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THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF RUTH

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES, INDEXES, ETC., ETC.

By VARIOUS AUTHORS

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FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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A HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

RUTH

WITH CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES

BY THE
REV. WALTER BAXENDALE

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON
Printed in the United States

PREFACE.

The Book of Ruth stands apart from other books of Scripture, and therefore may well deserve and demand a separate and somewhat distinct method of treatment. Neither doctrinal nor polemical, and scarcely to be called historical, it yet has the infinite suggestiveness which must always belong to human life, tried, tempted, and finally triumphant. With such a book it has seemed that the poets have sometimes caught its meaning, teaching, and spirit better than the theologians. So much also has been written upon it, and so well, that while, as in its own harvest field, there is room for the solitary gleaner, as well as the many reapers, it can scarcely be an unprofitable labour to endeavour in some measure "to bind into bundles" the precious grain so abundantly provided. The present attempt has aims in all three of these important directions.

In no sense however must this book be looked upon as a mere book of outlines. "The true value of a sermon" lies, as Mr. Spurgeon well says, "not in its fashion and manner, but in the truth which it contains." The author has aimed, first of all and above everything else, at gathering suggestive materials, and, for this purpose, the opinions of the many are often to be valued above the finished productions of the most highly gifted minds. He holds, too, with the great preacher already quoted, that "to divide a sermon well may be a very useful art, but what if there is nothing to divide? A mere division maker is like an excellent carver with an empty dish before him."

The character of the book lends itself naturally to expository preaching, and to a textual rather than a topical method of treatment. No two passages are exactly alike. The aim has been to bring out the precise meaning, teaching, and drift of each, rather than to use it as a standpoint for discoursing on topics which might better and more fairly be approached

from some other portion of God's Word. At the same time, themes and topics are continually suggested, the author taking that his work draws to a close when the topic itself has been fairly launched.

In an age when so much has been written about so little, he has no apology to offer for this deference to what some would call "the mere verbiage of the Scriptures." The only apology that could be offered is that the work has not been done more completely and with somewhat more of the thoroughness, scholarship, ability, and enthusiasm, distinguishing the Commentaries on our great master-pieces of human genius. His work has been hindered and postponed by a long and tedious brain affection, but it has been all throughout a labour of love, oppressed only by this feeling that "one can do but little to gild refined gold," and he leaves it with a deepened and ever-deepening sense of the beauty, tenderness, truthfulness, simplicity, and dignity of the Divine Word, as well as of its fitness and its suggestiveness amid the perplexing walks of common and daily life.

To acknowledge obligations in any special instance, where has been so much indebtedness, would be invidious. The author's plan has rendered it necessary that he should avail himself, as far as possible, of the labours of all who have preceded him. Wherever practical the name has been given; and he hopes this plan may not be without its uses in directing attention to works which need only to be known to be appreciated.

That his labours may be useful to his brethren, who amid the pressure of modern ministerial duties find it difficult to appropriate time to either special or extensive acquaintance with the literature of the book of Ruth, is the earnest and sincere prayer of their well-wisher and brother in the ministry of Jesus Christ,

WALTER BAXENDALE.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

RUTH.

INTRODUCTION.

(1.) Formed a part of the book of Judges in the ancient Hebrew canon, supplementary to that book, like the last five chapters at present, according to Josephus, Origen, Jerome. The Septuagint, in harmony with Jewish tradition, places it there without a separate title, and Melito of Sardis says the Jews of his day counted them together. Keil questions this (see note, p. 467 Keil's Intro.). Like the book of Judges, a narrative. The contents contrast. At the close of the latter a dark eclipse has fallen upon Israel; the last five chapters a history of sinners and their sins. In the one, Israel seen as a declining nation; the other shews the Gentile hope as enlarging. A connecting link between the book of Judges and that of Samuel; yet a joyous transition from the former (Wordsworth). Carries the history of Israel into the house of David. Links the monarchy with a more simple and primitive form of government. What is of more importance, traces the descent of Israel's greatest king directly from Judah. Like Esther, takes its title from the heroine. Both books link Jew and Gentile histories. Its canonicity has never been questioned among the Jews. Has the superscription of Cæsar, the stamp of the Holy Spirit (Fuller). Not in the Codex Sinaiticus. The Targum on Ruth only dates back as far as the seventh century. The Arabic version is generally considered to have been made from the Peshito Syriac.

(2.) According to modern Jews, Ruth holds a variable place among the Kethubim, or Hagiographa, that is, in the third class of O. T. writings, comprising the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. This owing to liturgical causes, as it was read from primitive times during the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost Raschi and others connect this with the proclamation of the kingdom of God among the nations; and as the custom dates back earlier than the birth of our Lord, the fact is significant. Represents the O.T. aspect towards the Gentiles. The Midrash explains that the law was given on Sinai *to all nations*, only it was not accepted by them. In the letter the book of Ruth forms a suitable introduction to the prophecies, in spirit it stands like the Psalms at the gates of the Gospel.

(3.) Not quoted or referred to in the N.T., unless the genealogy in Matthew is taken from it (comp. ch. iv. 18—22 with Matt. i. 4—6). The language generally pure Hebrew, and that of a very simple type. So-called Chaldaisms ought rather to be called archaisms, and are signs of antiquity and authenticity—vestiges of the ancient colloquial language of Palestine (Wordsworth). One of them found in the book of Job, another in Judges (comp. Ruth i. 4, Judges xxi. 23. Ruth i. 13, Job xxx. 24). They occur always in the dialogue, not in the

narrative portions of the book. The narrative Hebrew is good (Dr. Pusey) Sertain passages have a striking likeness to expression used in the book of Samuel. The quotations in Ruth are only taken from the earlier books of Scripture.

CONTENTS.

Matter, etc.—(4.) Consists of four chapters, eighty-five verses. Too simple to admit of artificial divisions, the existing chapters supply a convenient method of arrangement (Groser). May be divided into two parts: the first chapter shews that many are the troubles of the righteous; the three last, that God delivereth out of them all (Fuller). The four chapters may be called respectively, "The Famine," "The Harvest Field," "The Project," "The Result" (Binney). Like the book of Job, deals mainly with the history of an individual, and those associated with her life. In Job the afflictions prevail throughout the book. Not so here. With good reason the book is not called Naomi, or Boaz, or the Descent of David, but Ruth (Lange). She is the heroine. No prophetess like Deborah; not a queen like Esther; but a simple Moabitish maiden, a gleaner in the harvest fields, strong in her own simple purity. She is no saint, no devotee, no prophetess, but a very woman, and a woman

> "Not too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food."—*Wordsworth (quoted in Cox).*

The book celebrates the piety and loving faithfulness of a proselyte. Its heroism is that of the home and family. Does not preach by means of mighty deeds like those of Gideon and Samson, but by acts of love (Lange). Contrasts as much with the book of Esther (the only other book to which a woman's name is attached) as does the heroine with Deborah. Bertholdt and other neological writers treat both books as fictions or parables.

Character.—(5.) A prose pastoral. Has some of the finest features of a pastoral poem. A romantic, yet historic, Hebrew idyl (Steel and Terry). No doubt a love story (Cox). A beautiful, because natural, representation of human life (Hunter). *Catholic in its spirit.* Sympathetic, not critical. A book of reconcilation for those aliens who accept the true and living God.

> "The narrative displays no hatred towards foreigners, gives no prominence to the keen discriminations of the Mosaic law against them, notwithstanding that they form the background of the story: does not blame the really well-disposed Orpah, although she turns back; has not a word of reprehension for the anonymous relative who refuses to marry Ruth; but in contrast to these facts it causes the blessing which lights upon Ruth to become known."—*Lange.*

Deeply *religious, yet domestic.* A brief but exquisite story of hearth and home. Abounds with felicitous pictures of Oriental village life. Simplicity of rural manners beautifully depicted, not by a shadowy fiction, but in the homely records of affection and virtue (Eadie). Not the warrior or the king, but the farmer and householder, find their prototypes here (Lange). The reader finds himself now in the open field, now on the road, and anon among the assembly at the gate (Lange). *In style dramatic.* He makes his rustics talk in rustic fashion (Lange). Yet all this subdued, and with the finest moderation. A unique specimen of the art which conceals art. This prose idyl far exceeds those laboured songs and artificial delineations which grace the poetry of Greece and Rome (Eadie).

> "The book of Ruth is like some beautiful landscape of Claude, with its soft mellow hues of quiet eventide, and the peaceful expanse of its calm lake, placed side by side with some stern picture of Salvator Rosa, exhibiting the shock of armies and the storm of war; and receiving

more beauty from the chiaro-oscura of the contrast. Or if we may adopt another comparison, derived from classical literature, the book of Ruth, coming next after the book of Judges, is like a transition from the dark, terrific scenes of a tragedy of Æschylus, to the fresh and beautiful landscapes of some pastoral idyl of Theocritus, transporting us to the rural Thalysia, or harvest-home under the shade of elms and poplars, on the banks of the Halis, or to the flowery meadows and sheep-walks on those of the Arethusa or Anapus."—*Wordsworth.*

Simple, sometimes sorrowful, always touching. We have known strong and rough voices break down with emotion in reading aloud some of the passages (Kitto).* Occasionally becomes poetic in form as well as in substance. (See ch. i. 16, 17; iv. 11, 12, and 14, 15, in Wordsworth.) A most artless and inexpressibly charming picture of nature (Humboldt). The loveliest thing in the shape of an epic or idyl which has come to us (Goethe).

Scope and Object.—(1.) To teach the dignity and even sacredness of much we call secular and commonplace in life.

(2.) To afford a salutary example of virtue in times of trial (Theodoret). The moral encouraging to *unselfish* virtue (Speaker's Com.). It gives us a beautiful picture of *female* virtue, first shining in the midst of poverty, and then crowned with felicity (Lawson).

(3.) To shew how conversant God is as to the private affairs of His people. Lawson says, "We find here that private families are as much the objects of the Divine regard as the houses of princes."

(4.) To prove the watchful care of God over such as fear and trust Him, as well as His merciful providence towards the afflicted, the widow, and the fatherless (Eadie).

(5.) To portray the under-current of piety existing in households, even in times of great national wickedness (Wordsworth).

(6.) To set forth the power of love to overcome all the alienations, hostilities, and prejudices of nature, and of that second nature which we call habit (Cox). The story of a woman's love for a woman (Cox). Teaches that such love is valued before God (Lange).

(7.) To shew how a stranger, one of the hated house of Moab, may be exalted because of her trust in God (Umbreit).

(8.) To teach that when men and nations are falling away from God, missionary work is not at a standstill: a Ruth comes from Moab, and is joined to the church of God (Wordsworth).

(9.) To typify the calling of the Gentiles in Ruth the Moabitess (Fuller). To foretell that the Gentiles should be called in Christ (Topsell).

(10.) To exhibit the piety and faithfulness of David's ancestors (Keil). Written to do honour to David (Dr. Davidson).

(11.) To shew the pedigree of our Saviour, otherwise genealogists had been at a loss for four or five descents in the deducing thereof (Fuller). Supplies connecting links in the chain of evidence that Shiloh came of Judah.

(12.) To contain as it were the inner side, the moral background, of the genealogies which play so significant a part even in the Israelitish antiquity (Auberlen).

(13.) To typify in the marriage of Boaz and Ruth the espousal of the Church to Christ (Bede.) So Chrysos., "Ruth alienigena et Moabitis veniens, sub lege Dei, ea egit quæ figuram gestarent Ecclesiæ venientis ex gentibus." So Jerome, "Christus est Sponsus, cui illa venit ex gentibus sponsa." (Quoted in Wordsworth.) Spiritual and typical (Professor Bush). No mystical or allegorical sense can be assigned to the history (Speaker's Com.).

(14.) To inculcate a man's duty of marrying his kinswoman (Berthold and

* "It is said that Dr. Johnson once read the book of Ruth from MSS. to a company of fashionable people in London. Whereupon their admiration was so excited, that they requested to know where he had obtained so exquisite a story."—*Braden.*

other neological writers). The fact that Ruth's descendants are represented as the children of Boaz rather than of Mahlon, her former husband, against this view.

AUTHORSHIP AND CHRONOLOGY.

Authorship.—(7.) Like many other of the inspired books, the author's name is not inscribed. So far the custom is against giving the name. The Talmud affirms that the book of Judges was written by Samuel, and treats this as an appendix. Samuel is described as an historian (1 Chron. xxix. 29). This opinion held among the rabbis, and adopted by Isidorus and other ancient commentators. Not so Eichhorn, De Wette, Ewald, and many of the German critics. Dr. Davidson agrees with the latter, and thinks it is impossible to discover who was the writer of the book. He that has a piece of gold of right weight, and stamped with the king's image, cares not to know who minted or coined it (Fuller).

Date of Composition.—(8.) Written *after the crowning of Saul* (chap. i. 1), at a period *considerably later than the circumstances it relates* (chap. iv. 7). *After the birth of David*, since he is mentioned twice. From internal evidence *in a time of peace*, and in days singularly free from the bigoted and narrow spirit which generally clings to Jewish history. Could *not* have been composed *after the birth of Solomon*, or his name would have been added to the genealogies. The prejudice against Moabitish women becomes so intense afterwards as to render it extremely improbable such a book would either have been written, or if written accepted in the canon of Hebrew Scriptures (see 1 Kings xi. 1; Ezra x. 10; Neh. xiii. 1). Yet Bertheau, Davidson, and others ascribe its composition to the days of Hezekiah, and even Ezra, because of what are thought to be Chaldaisms in the more coloquial parts. This is extremely improbable, and held upon insufficient data. The book breathes the tone of David's life and times (Cox). Is in keeping with his sending his father and mother for safety into the land of Moab (1 Sam. xxii. 3), and with his whole history. Evidently David was an important personage to the writer; probably the most important in the realm. Keil thinks the book was not written before the culminating point of the reign of this great king. It would be sufficient to say before the anointing by Samuel. Such a book almost necessary to justify the act of the prophet in choosing the son of Jesse, to the exclusion of Saul's children. And what better justification than that of tracing David's descent from Judah? Tradition and internal evidence alike support this view, as well as the testimony of the rabbis and the early fathers. Worthy of notice, that no mention is made of David *as being king* in Ruth.

(9.) Keil puts an interval of 150 to 180 years between the events themselves and the writing of the book; Pusey, 100 years; and the former fancies the contents were not drawn from oral tradition, but that the author may have had the use of written documents. The reference to the custom of drawing off the shoe as belonging to the "former times" (iv. 7, 8) in favour of the longer period.

Date of Events.—(10.) Josephus relates the history of Ruth immediately after that of Samson, and even connects the narrative with the times of Eli. Cox accepts this, and says we may be reasonably sure that the story was enacted while Eli was judge. Bertheau places it in the latter part of the judges, and Keil advocated this view at first, but afterwards argued in favour of an earlier date, probably in the days of Gideon. Bishop Patrick, with Hengstenberg and others, inclines to this view, and points out that the only scarcity noticed in the book of Judges was in the time of Gideon (comp. Ruth i. 1 with Judges vi. 4—6). The generality of the Jews assign it to the period of Ibzan's government, the successor of Jephthah, conceiving Ibzan is another name for Boaz, as both belong to Bethlehem. (Wordsworth). Gantz adopts this, and notices the fact that Ibzan was the only judge born at Bethlehem. Vorstius says in the days of Deborah and Barak. Usher assigns

the narratives to the still earlier days of Ehud, or more probably Shamgar; and Lightfoot, following some eminent Jewish writers in general agreement with this, places it between the third and fourth chapters of Judges. Matthew Henry says it *must* have been towards the beginning of the judges' time; for Boaz, who married Ruth, was born of Rahab, who received the spies in the time of Joshua. Salmon, the father of Boaz, fought under Joshua.

The only landmarks to guide to a decision are the general statement of Ruth i. 1, that it was in the days when the judges ruled; and the genealogies found in Ruth iv. and Matt. i., with such help as may be obtained from internal evidence. The time of the judges generally estimated at about 400 to 450 years. (See Judges xi. 26; Kings vi. 1; Acts xiii. 20.) Another school of critics calculate from 300 to 350 years. Modern criticism is in favour of this latter view. 140 to 160 years left for the events related in the book of Judges (Speaker's Com.). Many of the events narrated possibly synchronous. Keil insists that the Ammonitish and Philistine oppressions occurred not successively, but simultaneously. The condition of Israel under the judges similar to that of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms under the Heptarchy (Speaker's Com.). Possibly Ehud, Jephthah, and even Gideon contemporaries, local magistrates raised to pre-eminence in their own particular districts. In every tribe the judge was the local magistrate. In Deut. xvi. 18 it is said thou shalt make thee judges (*shophetim*) in all thy gates. (See Lange's Introduction to Judges, p. 4, and Speaker's Com., pp. 118—120.)

(11.) Whatever the time between Joshua and David, it is spanned by four generations in the genealogy—Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, the latter being possibly an old man when David was born (1 Sam. xvii. 12). Usher thinks the ancestors of Israel's future king were blessed with extraordinary longevity. As the genealogy stands, Boaz is the grandfather of Jesse, and the son of Rahab, that is, if the Rachab of Matt. i. is the Rahab of Ruth iv., and of this there is but little doubt. Possibly some names of less famous ancestors are omitted, a common practice among the Hebrews (variously estimated by those who adopt the longer chronology at from four to six, and even eight to ten). Lange, and those who place the events in the days of Samson or Eli, say it is not to be supposed that names have fallen out between Boaz and Obed, or Obed and Jesse. The Scripture language, however, as to the earlier links in the chain, precise and unusually definite. Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab, and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth, the two Gentile mothers being mentioned as well as the fathers. Dr. Davidson goes so far as to say that "the scrupulous fidelity of the Jewish scribe is entirely of modern growth," and De Quincey says there is no correct system of chronology in the Old Testament. Either the genealogy is incomplete, or the chronology of Usher as derived from the book of Judges, wrong.

(12.) From internal evidence the events must have taken place in a time of spiritual declension and of famine,—a time of friendship with Moab, and possibly of hostility to the Philistines. The way southward to Egypt, or westward to Philistia not chosen, yet these were the usual granaries. Judges iii. presents us with an eighteen years' servitude under Moab, a revolt under Ehud, a conquest of Moab, and a fourscore years' rest, evidently from that direction, accompanied by inroads from the Philistines on the west. (See Judges iii. 14—30, 31.)

GEOGRAPHY.

Scene.—(13.) At first Bethlehem, then Moab, then Bethlehem and the regions around once again. Bethlehem, two short hours' journey south of Jerusalem. The most attractive and significant of all the world's birthplaces (Schubert). Under ordinary circumstances a fruitful land. Remarkably well watered in comparison with other parts of Palestine (Benjamin of Tudela). Even in the present state of

Palestine, deserves its old name. (See note on ch. i. ver 1.) Ritter says "Notwithstanding poor cultivation, the soil is fruitful in olives, pomegrantes, almonds, figs, and grapes. Hepworth Dixon thus describes its present appearance:—

"A string of gardens, a few steep fields, much crossing of white roads—so many that the point of junction may be called the Place of Paths—a glen which drops by leaps and steps to the great Cedron valley, makes the landscape. Yet the slope which is thus bound in by higher tops and more barren crests, has a winning beauty of its own, a joyous promise of bread and fruit, which puts it first among the chosen places of Judea. The old word Ephrath meant Place of Fruit, the newer word Bethlehem meant House of Bread; one following the other, as barley and maize come after grapes and figs, and the sower of grain succeeds to the breeder of goats and kine. The little bit of plain through which Ruth gleaned after the young men, together with a level of stony ground here and there in the glen toward Mar Saba, are the only corn lands occurring in the hill country of Judea for many a league. . . . The lovely green ridge of Bethlehem is the scene of some of our most tender and gracious poems: the idyls of Rachel, of Ruth, of Saul, of David, of Chimham, of Jeremiah, of the Virgin-mother; the subjects of these poems being the foremost passages in Israel's religious life."—*Dixon's Holy Land.*

Moab, on the other side, and S.E. of the Dead Sea, from Bethlehem. A district about forty miles long by twenty in width. In parts a luxuriant land when cultivated. The uplands are very fertile and productive (Professor Palmer). Now but scantily populated, but presenting evidences of former plenty and fertility. Cox says:—

"The name of Moab stands in the Bible for three districts on the east of the Dead Sea, but we can tell in which of these it was that Elimelech found a home and a grave, for one of these districts is expressly called 'The *Field* of Moab,' which is the technical phrase used throughout this book, while another was called "The *Land* of Moab," and a third "The *Dry*," i.e., the Dry Canton of Moab. This district or canton—the Field of Moab or Moab proper—has the precipices which border the Dead Sea on its western limits, a semicircular sweep of hills on the east, behind which lies the Arabian Desert; on the north it is defended by the tremendous chasm down which the river Arnon foams; while on the south the two ranges between which it lies run together, meet, and shut it in. It was a high tableland, dotted with cities, on which the grass grew sweet and strong; and it has been in all ages, as it is even now, a favourite haunt of pastoral tribes.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXILE AND THE RETURN.

CONTENTS.—*A famine in the land of Israel.—Elimelech a wealthy Hebrew, descended of an ancient and honourable house, goes down to the fields of Moab with his family. The removal is followed by his death; the marriage of his sons Mahlon and Chilion to Ruth and Orpah, and their death.—At the end of ten years, Naomi his wife returning, dissuades her two daughters from accompanying her further.—Orpah goes back, but Ruth continues with Naomi.—The two come to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest, and are received with astonishment.*

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—*Ver.* 1. Now] Heb. ו *vau*, and. The same introcopula between all the books of the O. T. so far, except in the opening of Deuteronomy, which begins abruptly. Keil (1 Kings i. 1) says the use of this conjunction at the beginning of a writing is a sure sign of its connection with another book. It came to pass in the days when the judges ruled (judged). וַיְהִי The imperfect with vau consec. simply attaches itself to a completed action, which has either been mentioned before, or is supposed to be well known (*Ewald*). Assigns a particular period. Shows also a different state of things [monarchy] existed around the writer. Time of the judges generally a troubled time. Spent to a large extent under the usurpation of neighbouring nations. Towards its end Israel had fearfully degenerated (Judges xxi. 25). Does not necessarily imply a judge ruled when Elimelech left the country (*Lawson*). A famine in the land] Threatened, Lev. xxvi. 19, 20; Deut. xxviii. 23, 24. Recognised as a Divine instrument of punishment, 2 Sam. xxiv. 13, 14; Ezek. v. 16; Amos iv. 6, 7. That it did not extend to Moab favours this idea. Said by some to have been caused by an incursion of the Midianites (see Judges vi. 3, 4) by the Philistines (*Cox*). Josephus says it was in the days of Eli (see Intro., par. 10—12). Solomon's prayer concerning famine (1 Kings viii. 35—37). Christians' duty during (Acts xi. 28). A more terrible famine (Amos viii. 11,

when men shall seek the word of God, and shall not find it. **And a certain man** (Heb. And a man) **of Bethlehem-Judah**] To distinguish it from another Bethlehem in Zebulon. Means, House of Bread. Ancient name Ephrata (fruitful), though this may have applied to the district as far as Jerusalem. Now called Beit-Lahm, or Beit-el-ham (*Mansford*). Rachel died here. David and Christ born here. Hepworth Dixon advances the theory that both may have been born in the house which is mentioned ch. iii. 3. (See note on that verse; also Dixon's "Holy Land.") References to Bethlehem in the book of Judges mournful ones (xvii. 7, xix. 1, 2). The turn of the narrative here same as in the former (*Speaker's Commentary*). Favours the idea that the writer was the same. **Went to sojourn**] Expresses correctly the meaning of the Heb., which signifies "to tarry as a stranger in a place." Isaac was forbidden this method of relief from famine (Gen. xxvi. 2), when he would have followed the example of Abraham in going down to Egypt (Gen. xii. 10). Israelites generally much attached to their own land. **In the country** (field or fields) **of Moab**] Bertheau maintains, we have in שְׂדֵה only another way of writing שָׂדֶה the singular (ver. 6). Keil, Gesenius, Fürst, look upon it as a form of the plural. The same style of expression used of Moab (Gen. xxxvi. 35; Num. xxi. 20; 1 Chron. i. 46). Moab connected with Israelites in the days of Ehud (Judges iii. 12—20). Continued to be an asylum for them (comp. 1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4; Isa. xvi. 34; Jer. xl. 11, 12). Israelites held places of trust there (1 Chron. iv. 22, 23). David sent his father and mother there. Moabites descendants of Lot (Gen. xix. 37), and worshippers of Chemosh. Their inheritance spared to them by command of God, when Israel entered into the land. This may account for the friendship with Israel, and in favour of the earlier date ascribed by Lightfoot and others to book of Ruth (see Intro., par. 10, 12). Moabites not admitted into the congregation of the Lord until the tenth generation, on account of their disgraceful origin. For description, etc., see Intro., par. 14. **He, and his wife, and his two sons**] Sarah went with Abraham (Gen. xii. 18) into Egypt. Rachel and Leah left their country with Jacob. The family of importance (ch. ii. and iii.), well known in Bethlehem (ch i. 19, and iv. 1). See notes on ver. 2.

CHAPTER I.—VERSE 1.

HOMILIES AND OUTLINES.

Theme.—THE FAMINE AND EXILE.

Now [and] ***it came to pass.*** Simple phrases bear the marks of a nation's way of thinking. Language has been called fossil thought, poetry. Here the Hebrew faith in an overruling hand. Not by chance, but by the orderly unfolding of events. A common scriptural form of introduction; simple, dignified, yet how much it may express.

I. View it simply as a statement of facts. (*a*) *These things happened.* The phrase introductory to a remarkable life; singled out from many others. Much not considered worthy of record. *Lives* of which the Scripture takes no note, written in the record kept until the last great day. *Events* which have dropped even from the pages of inspired history. Note: When God is silent, it is not wise to speak (*Welsh Proverb*).

But these things come within the scope of revelation—(*a*) for *wise* purposes. God saw fit to transmit the knowledge of them for our edification (2 Tim. iii. 16). Paul bids us look to Christ, yet learn of those who through faith and patience, etc. (Heb. vi. 12). (*β*) For *gracious* purposes. Here are links in the chain, and the end is Christ. The way leads through Moab back again to Bethlehem.

(*b*) *These things happened by the hand and providence of God.* The theocratic aspect is not prominent in the book of Ruth (*Davidson*). But it is there. A special hand of God in all this business, beyond man's purpose and thought (*R. Bernard*). The story of Ruth is an impertinence in Scripture, unless we believe in a special providence. This everywhere taken for granted in the Divine word. God in profane history, much more then in sacred. God in every life. The very absence of what is called the religious element has its significance. The book beautifully enforces what Wordsworth calls "natural piety." But more particularly amid these seemingly commonplace events a Divine purpose and plan. "While the judges were ruling, some one city, and some another, Pro-

vidence takes particular cognizance of Bethlehem, and has an eye to a King, to Messiah Himself" (*M. Henry*).

II. See in it a subtle connection between cause and effects.

In those days of ungodliness this happened. The judges ruled, but every man did right in his own eyes (Judges xxi. 25). Religion corrupted, worship decayed, idolatry common; and here are the results. When sin is ripe, vengeance is ready.

Notice (*a*) *National life affects individual history.* We cannot separate ourselves from our surroundings; are members one of another in many senses. We prosper or we suffer together in times of Divine visitation.

(*b*) *Life as it stands towards God influences life as it stands towards men.* All life an unfolding, a coming to pass. But how? Look for the seeds within, around, in the past; but look above for the hand overruling and *bringing to pass.* God of His most dear justice hath decreed the sum of all discipline (*Cyprian*). Divine law in the natural world immutable, so in the spiritual. The world of morals sways the sceptre over the world of circumstances. Every other view of life *practical* atheism. Do we believe it? rather, do we live as though we believed it? In prosperity we are commonly like hogs feeding on the mast, not minding his hand that shaketh it down; in adversity, like dogs biting the stone, not marking the hand that threw it (*Fuller*).

IMPROVEMENT. By-and-by our life will be summed up in this short sentence, "It came to pass;" the pilgrimage a road with many turnings, but all mapped out. The "to be" will be the "has been." And to what issues? Doubtless a link in some chain or other. Ruth's is joined to Israel's, to David's, to Christ's. A Gentile from the outer darkness brought within the hope of Israel. Gospel mercy foreshadowed so far back in the unfolding of events. In God's time, "it came to pass." Fuller says, "To typify the calling of the Gentiles, as He took of the blood of a Gentile into His body, so He should shed His blood out of His body for the Gentiles, that there might be one Shepherd and one sheepfold"—a quaint conceit, but enshrining precious truth. The ingathering had begun to work itself out in this "*coming to pass.*" The ingathering is going on *now.* How do we stand as towards it? Linked with Israel's hope, or —? What is the life unfolding? A history of one whom God has chosen, and who has chosen God? or the sad story of one who has wandered into strange lands, leaving behind him the home and the sanctuary of his fathers—wandered to die amid his wanderings? or the story of one who did run well for awhile like Orpah? Which is it?

"It is our fault that we look upon God's ways and works by halves and pieces; and so we see often nothing but the black side. . . . We see Him bleeding His people, scattering parliaments, chasing away nobles and prelates, as not willing they should have a finger in laying one stone of His house; yet do we not see that in this dispensation the other half of God's work makes it a fair piece?"—*Rutherford.*

"Life is all one unfolding, as of some quaint manuscript which now we may not be able to decipher, but which by-and-by will prove itself to the righteous a new Scripture full of the benedictions of God."—*B.*

"The curtains of yesterday drop down, the curtains of to-morrow roll up, but yesterday and to-morrow both *are.* Time and space are not God, but creations of God. With God, as it is a universal HERE, so is it an everlasting NOW."—*Carlyle.*

Theme.—THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS.

In the days when the judges ruled [judged], ***a famine, etc.***

God takes the events into His own hands. While the judges are judging, God too is holding the balances. The times were evil. Six long servitudes, at least, mark the Divine displeasure at Israel's sin. Sin deprived angels of heaven, Adam of Paradise, Cain of his honour, Reuben of his birthright, thousands of the land of Canaan (*R. Bernard*). Now it deprives Israel of food. A blessing promised on their land, their basket and their store, as long as they walked in His law (Lev.

xxvi. 3—5; Deut. xxviii. 5). Evidently they had departed from that law. And now the presence of the godly in the land cannot avert the evil, as at Sodom. The fact that there are children in the households of Israel does not stay the Divine hand as at Nineveh. No place is exempt, not even Bethlehem. The rich suffer with the poor, for Elimelech belonged to a wealthy and honourable family.

See in this, **I. Designed punishment.** Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? God has many arrows in His quiver; the land may have rest, but it has not plenty (*M. Henry*). Famine, the peculiar instrument used—a very terrible one. David preferred the pestilence (2 Sam. xxiv. 14). But no choice is given here.

Notice (*a*) *God's judgments come in a very natural way.* The wonted streams dry up possibly from very apparent causes—easy to understand, easy to explain. A drought or an inroad of the enemy may have caused this. But beyond natural causes, another reason—behind Nature, GOD. He turns a fruitful land into barrenness, because of the wickedness of them that dwell therein (Ps. cvii. 34).

(*b*) *There is always something special in them worthy our attention.* Esau, despising his birthright, lost it. Lot, led of his lust into Sodom, had to leave behind all for which he lusted. Judas perished "in the midst" of the field he had purchased with the price of blood. (See Alford on Acts i. 8.) A sad irony often in the history of sinners and their sins. So here, a famine in the land flowing with milk and honey! No bread in Bethlehem, the house of bread! And more, Moab has plenty while Israel is pinched with penury.

(*c*) *There is always a reason which stands out in connection with them.* God had said expressly He would deal with Israel after this fashion. Famine was to be to them one especial mark of His displeasure (Lev. xxvi. 19, 20). Moab may have ease, not so Israel (Jer. xv. 11, xlviii. 11); for Moab is as the unregenerate, his taste for earthly enjoyment and sensual gratification unchanged. The wicked have their portion in this life, but Christ says woe to them (Luke vi. 25; Amos vi. 1). And Paul reasons of such, "Then are ye bastards, and not sons."

See in this, **II. Necessary discipline.** Chastisement meant discipline with Israel. Jehovah explains the weary wilderness privations as intended "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart." This famine has a like explanation (Judges ii. 20—22), if it resulted either from a Midianitish or Philistine invasion, as is probable. (See Notes and Introduction.) The prodigal child was brought from the keeping of harlots to the keeping of hogs (*Fuller*). And why? The "I will arise" explains and justifies "the hungering in a far country." So always. Christ for mere trial sometimes, for sin at other times, doth cover Himself with a cloud (*Rutherford*). Whatever the reason, the Divine purpose the same—discipline.

(*a*) *Notice the different forms this discipline may take,* as illustrated by the narrative. Want, scarcity of provisions, possibly hunger, and these leading to loss of worldly possessions and the family patrimony, absence from the sanctuary, wanderings in strange lands, years of exile, death to most of them in a foreign land. A similar epitome might be made of many a family history—

> "They grew in beauty side by side,
> They filled one home with glee;
> Their graves are scattered far and wide,
> By mount and stream and sea."—*Mrs. Hemans.*

(*b*) *Notice the severity of this particular form.* Hunger a most trying test. Any kind of deprivation is. The same cause sent Abraham and Jacob into Egypt, Isaac to Gerah. Even Christ must feel its pangs when He is led into the wilderness to be tempted.

IMPROVEMENT. The dispensations of Providence strange—sovereign, even punitive. Can we see this other thing, that they are disciplinary ("Whom the Lord loveth," etc., Heb. xii. 6), and may be beneficial? This last aspect depends

largely upon ourselves. He is dealing with us in one way or other. If not by famine, then by our very abundance; if not by plenty, then perhaps by penury. And to what effect? *Driving us* towards Moab; away from the sanctuary; away from all that links us with the people of God? There is this sad possibility, and the narrative which follows may warn us of this. *Or ripening us* for that land where there is no hunger? tribulation working patience, etc. (Rom. v. 3).

Topsell treats the passage—

I. That the corruption of religion and the neglect of the worship of God is the cause of all His judgments.

II. That the Lord is true in His judgments as in His mercies (Deut. xxviii. 23, 24; Ps. cxlv. 17; 2 Thess. i. 6).

Bernard—

I. That people deprive themselves by their sins, of that which God had given, and they enjoyed, according to His promise.

II. That a fruitful land is made barren for the sins of the inhabitants thereof.

III. That judgment begins at the house of the Lord.

Fuller derives the following uses [lessons]:—

I. Let us practise that precept, "Babes, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John v. 21).

II. Let us be heartily thankful to God for our plenty.

III. Let us pray with David, "Deliver us from blood-guiltiness."

IV. Let us be pitiful and liberal to relieve the distresses of the poor.

"Burckhardt states that in Nejd in Arabia famines like these recur at intervals of from ten to fifteen years."—*Wordsworth.*

"The Athenian women had a custom to make a picture of famine every year, and to drive it out of their city with these words: 'Out famine, in food; out penury, in plenty!' But let us say in word, and second it in deed, 'Out sin, in sanctity; out profaneness, in piety:' and then we shall see that as long as our king reigneth, there shall be no famine in our land. . . . Is this the land whereof it is said, 'Asher his bread shall be fat, and afford dainties for a king' (Gen. xlix. 20), which is called 'a good land of wheat and barley, vineyards and fig trees, oil, olive, and honey' (Deut. viii. 7); which is commended (Ezek. xx. 6) to be 'a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands'? . . . The people's hard hearts were rebellious to God, and the hard earth proved unprofitable to them; their flinty eyes would afford no tears to bemoan their sins, and the churlish heavens would afford no moisture to wake their earth; man proved unfaithful to God his Maker; the earth proved unfaithful to man her manurer."—*Fuller.*

"Think not that the fertility of a land is able to secure its inhabitants against famine, or that any earthly advantage is sufficient to secure us against any calamity whatsoever. All things are in the hands of God, and His creatures change their qualities or effects at His pleasure."—*Lawson.*

"A clear and striking proof that here is no continuing city or place of abode, and shews the necessity of our seeking a city which hath foundations, the builder and maker of which is God. For if a man be ever so agreeably situated in the midst of plenty, Divine Providence can soon drive him from his rest, and reduce him to the disagreeable necessity of depending upon the bounty of even the wicked themselves, who are, like Moab, for ever shut out from the sanctuary of Jehovah."—*Macgowan.*

"When afflictions fail to have their due effect, the case is desperate."—*Bolingbroke.*

"Suffering seasons have generally been sifting seasons, in which the Christian has lost his chaff, and the hypocrite his courage."—*Secker.*

"There is a deep truth contained in the fabled story of old, where a mother, wishing to render her son invulnerable, plunged him into the Styx, but forgot to dip in his heel, by which she held him. We are baptized in the blood and fire of sorrow, that temptation may make us invulnerable; but let us remember that trials will assail us in our most vulnerable part, be it the head, or heart, or heel."—*Robertson.*

Theme.—THE DEPARTURE FROM HOME.

"Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide."—*Milton.*

And a certain man of Bethlehem went to sojourn in the country [fields] ***of Moab.***

An exile leaving Bethlehem, like Dante leaving his beloved Florence. To this

man also *nunquam revocare.* He dies in exile. God's providences often unexplained in this life—await the clearer light of eternity. Some blame Elimelech's going to Moab. Possibly self-exiled. But no man ought to be condemned without proofs of guilt, and no certain proofs appear in the present case (*Lawson*). Israelites were not prohibited sojourning in a strange land. David dwelt in Gath. Sent his father and mother for protection into Moab. What if a kindred necessity impelled Elimelech?

I. Suggests the mutability of human affairs. (*a*) *We must expect changes in this world*, changes which make life Mara (ver. 20). While Moab is at ease, Israel is to be poured from vessel to vessel. Elimelech an Israelite, and they were much attached to their land—dwelt in the most fertile part of the country, probably a rich man (see notes), and yet in his old age he must become a wanderer. No condition of life, no circumstances, no experience, can exempt us. (*b*) *We cannot always dwell where we wish.* David must sojourn in the tents of Kedar, leave city and palace behind, and flee to the wilderness. El must go down to Moab, Joseph to Egypt. Nay, touches the holiest: Christ Himself a wanderer, "not having where to lay His head."

II. Presents a picture of restlessness under affliction.

Sight, not faith, guides Elimelech. The sublime trust which waits upon God in these hours of peril seemingly absent. The promise to Israel, "Thou shalt eat bread without scarceness" (Deut. viii. 9). To us, "Rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him; verily thou shalt be fed" (Ps. xxxvii. 3, 7). "In the days of famine thou shalt be satisfied" (ver. 19).

Outward appearances against the promises. Faith weak—he went down to Moab. Some suggest desire after gain led him. Dr. Cumming thinks that he fled from the sight of poverty and want around him. He went out "full." Certainly strong reasons demanded for a change like this. Otherwise God says to such, "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy ways?" (Jer. ii. 36.)

Restlessness a very common sin. At the first approach of trial men grow impatient; seek a change in outward circumstances, or in doctrine; become offended even with Christ Himself (John vi. 66).

Note.—*One single restraint made Adam a wanderer from God.* (See outlines on ver. 2.)

And **III. May illustrate spiritual declension.**

Elimelech a wealthier man than many of his neighbours, who bore the brunt of famine rather than expose their children to the seductions of heathen license (*Cox*). If all should do as he did, Canaan would be dispeopled (*M. Henry*). What was the cause in his case? Did he value the sanctuary privileges less, or the good things of this world more than they?

Note a principle in this. Men go down to Moab,

(*a*) *Because the promised land itself seems to yield them scanty supplies.* The narrow way not attractive in itself. A gospel that says by the mouth of its Master, "Sell all that thou hast," and by one of its chief apostles, "Silver and gold have I none"—a service which demands honesty, though honesty should prove to be other than the best policy—truthfulness, though truth be an offence—must seem meagre in its rewards, alas to how many! They follow for awhile, charmed by the novelty of Christ's kingdom. Sooner or later He is seen as "one not having where to lay His head," a "root out of a dry ground." Human nature asks large things (2 Kings v. 13). His gospel has chosen the weak things and things which are not (1 Cor. ii. 27, 28). *Scanty supplies a great secret of spiritual declension.*

(*b*) *Because of the rich abundance inviting them there.* Possibly pinched by famine, and in all probability fearing to lose his flocks and herds, the rich grass lands on the other side of the Dead Sea proved irresistible to this man. Lot went down to dwell among the wicked cities of the plain for similar reasons—led of his own spirit and of his own judgment. To both men the journey was as

disastrous as it was tempting. So Judas, Demas. *Abundance is not everything.* The world may seem to have it, does seem to have it even to the righteous (see Psalms xxxvii. 35, lxxiii. 5, 7, 12). A blight always upon it when the righteous seek it. Elimelech goes down to Moab to die there. Lot has to escape from Sodom "as by fire." The young man who came to our Lord went away "sorrowful."

Fuller observes: "It is lawful for men to leave their native soil, and to travel into a foreign country; as—

I. For merchants, provided always that, while they seek to make gainful adventures for their estates, they make not 'shipwreck of a good conscience.'

II. For ambassadors, that are sent to see the practices and negotiations in foreign courts.

III. For private persons that travel with an intent to accomplish themselves with a better sufficiency to serve their king and country."

Bernard observes:

I. No place is exempt from punishment, where sin is suffered to reign.

II. God can remove, by one means or another, men out of their homes and harbour. No man may think himself securely settled.

III. Fear of corporal wants will make men leave their homes, their native soil, their friends and kindred. How much more, then, for the love of eternal life, should we be willing to forsake all!"

Topsell—We note,

I. It is lawful for the godly, in the time of necessity, to crave help or relief of the very enemies of God, so they be not polluted with their superstitions.

II. That the Lord doth ever provide for His faithful servants in all their miseries. Joseph sent beforehand to provide for his brethren (Gen. xlv. 45); Obadiah, who hid fifty of the prophets, and fed them in a cave (1 Kings xviii. 13); Elijah provided for (1 Kings xvii. 4—10; see also 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9).

"When we go from home, it depends entirely on the will of God whether we shall arrive at the place of our destination. When we are in it, it depends no less on the Divine pleasure whether we shall ever again see the place from which we went out. 'A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.' Beware of bringing upon yourselves the punishment that came upon the proud king of Babylon, because he did not glorify that God in whose hand his breath was, and whose were all his ways. Do not say that to-morrow you will go into such a city, and buy, and sell, and get gain. Say rather if the Lord will."—*Lawson.*

"It is an evidence of a discontented, distrustful, unstable spirit, to be weary of the place in which God has set us, and to be for leaving it immediately whenever we meet with any uneasiness or inconvenience in it. It is a folly to think of escaping that cross which, being laid in our way, we ought to take up. It is our wisdom to make the best of that which is, for it is seldom that changing our place is mending it."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Now if any do demand of me my opinion concerning our brethren, which of late left this kingdom to advance a plantation in New England, surely I think as St. Paul said concerning virgins, he had 'received no commandment of the Lord;' so I cannot find any just warrant to encourage men to undertake this removal; but think rather the counsel best that King Joash prescribed to Amaziah, 'Tarry at home.' Yet, as for those that are already gone, far be it from us to conceive them to be such to whom we may not say 'God speed.' I conclude, therefore, of the two Englands, what our Saviour saith of the two wines (Luke v. 39), 'No man having tasted of the old presently desireth the new; for he saith, The old is better.'"—*Fuller.*

"The merchant, having obtained his bank, promiseth rest and security to himself; the husbandman, having gathered his fruits, never doubteth but he shall spend them, and provideth for more; the gentleman, coming to his lands, thinketh his revenues and pleasant life will endure alway, like the apostles when Christ was transfigured in the Mount, presently they would build tabernacles of residence; but as the cloud came betwixt them and heaven, and bereaved them of their purpose, even so suddenly will death come and deprive you of your profits, call the merchant from his bank, the husbandman from his farm, the gentleman from his land, the prince from his kingdom."—*Topsell.*

"Sometimes it dimly dawns upon us, when

we see other men's mischiefs and wrongs, that we are in the same category with them, and that perhaps the storms which have overtaken them will overtake us also. But it is only for a moment; for we are artful to cover the ear, and not listen to the voice that warns us of our danger."—*Beecher.*

"What is this passing scene?
A peevish April day!
A little sun, a little rain,
And then night sweeps along the plain,
And all things fade away.
Man (soon discussed)
Yields up his trust,
And all his hopes and fears lie with him in the dust.
Then since this world is vain,
And volatile and fleet,
Why should I lay up earthly joys,
Where dust corrupts, and moth destroys,
And cares and sorrows eat?
Why fly from ill
With anxious skill,
When soon this hand will freeze, this throbbing heart be still?"
Kirke White.

"There are evils worse than famine. What is the real misfortune of life? sin or want of food? sickness or selfishness? And when I see Isaac (Gen. xxvi.) gaining from his want of food the heart to bear up and bear right onward, I can understand that the land of famine may be the land of promise, and just because it is the land of famine."—*Robertson.*

"People do not leave their country for a mere whim. To forsake the homestead where the boys were born, to bid farewell to familiar well-tried friends, to leave the spot made sacred by religious worship, for a heathen country—it is hard! very hard! Elimelech and Naomi must have felt this. . . . . These involuntary emigrants hoped to return speedily—when times were better. Little did they dream that three out of the four would be lying in their graves before ten years had passed. Their farewell was a final one. Oh! these plans of ours, what folly they appear to us when we look back to see how one touch has ruined them all! Our designs always need 'if the Lord will' written right across the face of them."—*Braden.*

"One month in the school of affliction will teach thee more than the great precepts of Aristotle in seven years; for thou canst never judge rightly of human affairs, unless thou hast first felt the blows and found out the deceits of fortune."—*Fuller.*

"Probably this family held on, trusting that prosperity would again smile; but it came not, and hope faded away. What were they to do? Terrible question! Crops gone, cattle gone; starvation stared them in the face."—*Braden.*

Theme.—FAMILY CHANGES.

"Urged by remembrance sad, and decent pride,
Far from those scenes which knew their better days."

He, and his wife, and his two sons.

Touches the whole household. The children bear the burden as well as their parents. In times of scarcity, the family a heavy burden. Christ uses this as an extreme case, "Woe to them that are with child and give suck in those days!" (Matt. xxiv. 19.)

We have here, **I. An important step in the family history.** Not lawful unless there had been a public calamity or some great private necessity (*Maimonides*). Nothing but necessity can dispense with a local relinquishing of God's church, not pleasure, nor profit, nor curiosity (*Bishop Hall*). In moments like these, go not before God and Providence, but follow Him (*Rutherford*).

II. A united household in these trying times. Domestic union in the midst of the greatest distresses. Nothing can separate those whom God has joined. Grace finds its most appropriate sphere in the family life. *Husbands and wives who aim at separate interests reproved here.* Naomi willing to go even to a strange land. Saw the necessity. She was one of those wives whose law is their husband's will in all things wherein the laws of God leave them at liberty (*Lawson*). A man and his wife should be like the two wheels of a chariot (*Hindoo Proverb*).

III. A parent's responsibility in these critical changes. The results of Elimelech's conduct were not confined to himself. His children either gained or suffered by it. No man lives to himself, sins to himself.

His care for his wife and children to be commended (1 Tim. v. 8). Did not leave them as the ostrich, to care for themselves (Job xxxix. 16). He acted kindly, did he act wisely? One thing certain, his responsibility was increased by

going down to Moab, where temptation was sure to assail his children. Possible to live like Joseph in Pharaoh's court, but how difficult!

"All worship not at idol feasts,
Whose lot it is to live in idol lands."

David in his exile. Daniel and the three Hebrew children in Babylon. But how few come out untainted! Lot's children seem to have carried the defilement with them when they left Sodom (Gen. xix.).

This man went to sojourn, not to stay. God did not forsake him. The wanderers were fed. Josephus speaks of his "happy prosperity" in the land of Moab. There is *a law of compensation*, however, in connection with all this. He died there. His children married Moabitish women, and then died in exile. His wife returned empty to that place she had left (ver. 21).

"The religious man may be considered in his family as the key-stone to the arch."—*Salter.*

"Is such a man a Christian?" was asked of Whitefield. "How should I know?" was the answer; "I never lived with him."

"The very tigress fostereth her young, and the helpless hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and exerts the full extent of her feeble powers in their defence."—*Macgowan.*

"The godly in old time knew that their wives and children were as themselves; and as they were careful to cherish their own bodies, so they were mindful to nourish their own families."—*Topsell.*

"An honest man careth for his wife and children as well as for himself."—*Bernard.*

"We see the flesh of fishes remaineth fresh, though they always swim in the brackish waters."—*Fuller.*

"If Elimelech had made inquiry, it is probable he would have found plenty in some of the tribes of Israel; and if he had had that zeal for God and His worship, and that affection for his brethren which became an Israelite, he would not have persuaded himself so easily to go and sojourn in Moab."—*M. Henry.*

"Life is the first thing. God wishes no man to starve; and if his circumstances are such that, by remaining in them, he must suffer want and death, his path is clear—he must depart. Bishop Hall quaintly says, 'The Creator and Possessor of the earth hath not confined any man to his necessary destruction.' It may be our duty, in order to save ourselves from pecuniary difficulties, to sever the dearest ties."—*Braden.*

"Now the devil knoweth that this is a blow at the root, and a ready way to prevent the succession of churches; if he can subvert families, other societies and communities will not long flourish and subsist with any power and vigour; for there is the stock from whence they are supplied both for the present and future."—*Manton.*

"Families are societies that must be sanctified to God, as well as churches; and the governors of them have as truly a charge of the souls that are therein, as pastors have of churches. But, alas! how little is this considered or regarded! But while negligent ministers are (deservedly) cast out of their places, the negligent masters of families take themselves to be almost blameless. They offer their children to God in baptism, and there they promise to teach them the doctrine of the gospel, and bring them up in the nurture of the Lord; but they easily promise and easily break it; and educate their children for the world and the flesh, although they have renounced these, and dedicated them to God. This covenant-breaking with God, and betraying the souls of their children to the devil, must lie heavy on them here and hereafter. They beget children and keep families merely for the world and the flesh; but little consider what a charge is committed to them, and what it is to bring up a child for God, and govern a family as a sanctified society."—*Westminster Confession of Faith.*

"Home is the chief school of human virtue. Its responsibilities, joys, sorrows, smiles, tears, hopes, and solicitudes form the chief interest of human life."—*Channing*

VERSE 2.

Critical and Exegetical Notes.—*Ver.* 2. **And the name of the man (was) Elimelech.** A descendant of Nahshon mentioned in connection with the erection of the tabernacle (Numb. i. 7). According to Jewish doctors, a noble and potent person. All names ending with "melech" (*king*) borne by distinguished persons (*Lange*). Means to whom God is king (*Keil*). My God is King (*Lange*). My God is my King (*Cox*). God is King (*Wordsworth*). Josephus calls him Abimelech. **Naomi,** more correctly Noomi [LXX. Νωεμιν; Vulg., Noemi; Old Eng. trans. Noemi]. According to Talmudists, niece of Naason, prince of the tribe of Judah, and daughter of his brother Salmon (?). Means my pleasure or delight (*Wright*); pleasant, gracious (*Gesen.*); the lovely gracious one (*Lange*); happiness (*Josephus*). **Mahlon,** more correctly Machlon, the husband of Ruth. Means sickness (*Wright*), sick (*Gesen.*); the weakly (*Keil*); consumption (*M. Henry*). Not so (*Lange*);

rather derived from מָחוֹל (*machol*) "circle dance," Greek *choros*, and so may mean joy. Chilion, more correctly Kilion. (*Sept.*, Χελαίων; *Josephus*, Χελλιων); means pining (*Keil*), destruction (*Wright*). Not so; should be referred to כָּלַל, to crown, and so means ornament (*Lange*). Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah. Some of the older Jewish teachers not inappropriately render "Ephratim" by *ευγενεσταται* [high-born] (*Lange*). Shews these were natives of the city or district around Bethlehem, not mere residents (comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 12; Judges xvii. 7). The place honourably distinguished, and Jesus Himself called an Ephrathite of Judah in Micah v. 2. Euphrates, Ephraim (Gen. xl. 52), words having a similar derivation and meaning. (See also notes on ver. 1.) The Ephraimites called Ephrathites (Judges xii. 5: 1 Sam. i. 1; 1 Kings xi. 26) (*Wright*). And they came into the country [field] of Moab, and continued there [literally, were there; Old Eng., abode there]. The Targum adds, and were there as princes. The route supposed to be down the Wady Sudier to Engedi, and then round the S.E. shores of the Dead Sea, as with modern travellers. Moab not so large as Huntingdonshire, and not so far from Bethlehem as is Huntingdon from London (*Cox*).

Theme.—MAN PROPOSING, GOD DISPOSING.

"*And the name of the man* (was) *Elimelech*, ... *Ephrathites of*," etc.

Names give an air of truth to the narrative (*Lawson*). Express in a very touching manner parental hopes and faith. Of especial significance among the early Hebrews. A really good name of unspeakable service to all who are capable of feeling its aspiration (*Dr. J. Hamilton*). But sometimes given in vain. When contrasting with the character, a continual humiliation.

Suggests, **I. That however others may propose, the final issues of life are with God and with the man himself.**

These names remarkably significant and suggestive. But in what way? Elimelech means "my God is King," and yet some take his life as illustrating the feelings and conduct of the spiritually dead; others, of the backslider driven by momentary trials from God's ordinances down to Moab. *Note* (*a*) *the irony of a good name when men fall short of its promises.* At the present day, men baptized Martin Luther by their Protestant parents are found ministering at the altar of Rome (*Braden.* See extracts). Naomi means pleasure, delight, happiness, and yet she comes at best to be an illustration of sanctified affliction. Possibly the names of the whole family pitched in this exultant key (see notes), and yet their experience is in sad contrast.

(*b*) *Events as they unfold often make vain all human forecastings.* Even parental love not always prophetic. The name given with many fond anticipations, perhaps with much heart searching and prayer. That is all the human can do—the rest is in the hands of God.

The *local designation* of these Hebrews enforces similar lessons. They were Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah, a title as honourable as any an Israelite could desire. And yet under stress of circumstances Bethlehem-Judah changes to Moab, Ephrathites (probably meaning "high-born") to exiles.

II. That it is not how men are called, but how they live, and what they are, which is the important thing.

A deadly heresy to rest satisfied with the outward calling of things. The conventional Christian hearing himself termed so continually, begins possibly to lay the flattering unction to his soul that he is such. The sweet delusion grows, eats into the heart of the man. No greater offence than to deny him *that* title. Translate it to mean "the Christ-like," or even the "follower of Christ," and what then? So the conventional church member bears as lofty a name as this, "My God is King." A member of Christ, for the Church is "His body." You may explain that bond to imply "My Saviour my Head" (Eph. iv. 15), and yet how many are satisfied with the mere name! This—

A strong delusion.—The "name to live, and are dead."

A transparent folly.—Others see through it; if not, God does.

A cruel self-deception.—Born of presumption, fostered of hypocrisy.

A crowning impiety.—Disastrous, Laodicean, deadly (Rev. iii. 15—19).

III. That men consecrated by the loftiest associations of the past come to these strange experiences

Elimelech, of an ancient family, born in the most honourable of birth-places, dedicated seemingly from his youth upwards. His name should have taught him faith. Had he been true to that, all would have been well, and possibly he would never have gone down to Moab.

So those born as it were inside the Church, early dedicated to God, registered among His covenant people, and yet to-day they are prodigals in the far country, Cains with the brand upon them, though with something also which speaks of the old family relationship—at best Elimelechs in Moab—God mourning over them, as over Ephraim (Hosea vi. 4) the departed glory of their youth, gone like "the morning cloud and the early dew"—asking, as of Israel, "How shall I put thee among the children, give thee a pleasant land?" (Jer. iii. 19.)

IMPROVEMENT.—*Sainted memories may become sad remembrances;* mementoes of a better past, reminders of a glory which has been, and is departed. Men carry something with them from the past, must carry it. Does it come in to upbraid or to bless? How was it with this name Elimelech in Moab? Might have taught faith even there. But did it?

These patriarchs and early believers types of those still found in our midst. The history of the most insignificant not without meaning. They hold the mirror to all time, though the natural man, beholding his face as in a glass, straightway forgets what manner of man he is. Elimelech going down to Moab! Is the case without a parallel in our experience? "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone."

"Great birth, good means, high name and fame, save not from falling either into sin or outward misery, if a better blessing than all these be not given men from God."—*Bernard.*

"How happy must that man be whose God is King! He may be driven by famine, by persecution or otherwise far from the house of his God, yet he can never be banished to any place but where God is his King."—*Macgowan.*

"In the Hebrew history are discernible three periods distinctly marked, in which names and words bore very different characters, corresponding to the periods in which the nation bore the three different appellations of Hebrews, Israelites, Jews.

"In the first, names meant truths, and words were the symbols of realities. The characteristics of the names given were simplicity and sincerity.

"The second period begins about the time of the departure from Egypt, and it is characterised by unabated simplicity, with the addition of sublimer thought, and feeling more intensely religious. The heart of the nation was big with mighty and new religious truth, and the feelings with which the national heart was swelling found vent in the names which were given abundantly. God, under His name Jah, the noblest assemblage of spiritual truths yet conceived, became the adjunct to names of places and persons. Oshea's name is changed into Je-hoshua.

"In the third period, words had lost their meaning, and shared the hollow, unreal state of all things."—*Robertson (abridged).*

"The meaning in names not always true. Absalom meant 'father's peace,' but the young man broke his father's heart. Solomon called his son Rehoboam, 'an enlarger,' but he reduced the kingdom instead of enlarging it."—*Braden.*

"The believing Church is Christ's Naomi, His sweet and pleasant one, and He is her Elimelech, her God the King. For her He forsook the mansions of plenty and delight—with her He sojourned in a Moabitish world, amongst enemies to God; there He died an accursed death to accomplish her salvation; there He was buried to purify the grave for her use, rose again to trample on all her enemies, and is now gone to Bethlehem, the House of Bread, to prepare a place for His Noami."—*Macgowan.*

Here also we may see that it was a custom of great antiquity in the world, that men and women should have several names whereby they were called, and that for these three reasons:

I. That they might be differenced and distinguished from others.

II. That they might be stirred up to verify the meanings and significations of their names. Wherefore let every Obadiah strive to be a "servant of God," each Nathanael to be "a gift of God," Onesimus to be "profitable," every Roger "quiet and peaceable," Robert "famous for counsel," and William "a help and defence" to many; not like Absalom, who was not a "father of peace," as his name doth import, but a son of sedition; and Diotrephes, not "nursed by God," as his name sounds, but puffed up by the devil, as it is 3 John 9.

III. That they might be incited to imitate the virtues of those worthy persons who formerly have been bearers and owners of their names. Let all Abrahams be faith-

ful, Isaacs quiet, Jacobs prayerful, Josephs chaste; every Lewis pious, Edward confessor of the true faith, William conqueror over his own corruptions. Let them also carefully avoid those sins for which the bearers of the names stand branded to posterity. Let every Jonah beware of frowardness, Thomas of distrustfulness, Martha of worldliness, Mary of wantonness. If there be two of our names, one exceedingly good, the other notoriously evil, let us decline the vices of the one, and practise the virtues of the other. Let every Judas not follow Judas Iscariot, who betrayed our Saviour, but Judas the brother of James, the writer of the General Epistle; each Demetrius not follow him in the Acts, who made silver shrines for Diana, but Demetrius (3 John 12) who had a "good report of all men;" every Ignatius not imitate Ignatius Loyola the lame father of blind obedience, but Ignatius the worthy martyr in the primitive church. And if it should chance, through the indiscretion of parents and godfathers, that a bad name should be imposed on any, Oh let not "folly" be "with" them, because Nabal is their name; but in such a case let them strive to falsify, disprove, and confute their names. Otherwise, if they be good, they must answer them. In the days of Queen Elizabeth, there was a royal ship called "The Revenge," which, having maintained a long fight against a fleet of Spaniards (wherein eight hundred great shot were discharged against her), was at last fain to yield; but no sooner were her men gone out of her, and two hundred fresh Spaniards come into her, but she suddenly sunk them and herself; and so "The Revenge" was revenged. Shall lifeless pieces of wood answer the names which men impose upon them, and shall not reasonable souls do the same? But of all names I pray God that never just occasion be given that we be christened "Ichabod," but that the glory may remain in our Israel so long as the faithful Witness endureth in heaven.

Theme.—THE SOJOURN IN MOAB.

"Nos patriæ fines, et dulcia linguimus arva;
Nos patriam fugimus."—*Virgil.*

And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

In weighing human actions, difficult to say what is merely an error of judgment and what an error of heart. The former slides imperceptibly into the latter. We take a false step—pride prevents our retracing it, habit comes in to perpetuate the mistake. Thus folly becomes sin and the cause of sin. Elimelech not to be severely condemned in that, driven by stress of famine, he went down to Moab. Very human this. *What of his continuing there?*

After all, a man must be judged by the standard of his own times. This would in some measure condemn Elimelech. [Jewish expositors do so almost unanimously.] The land given to Israel to inhabit, under special circumstances, with special promises (Deut. xxviii.). Would not the true Israelite have heard the call "to return" sounding in his ears continually? May we not say at least what was not of faith was of sin? Note. *An error generally, though on the side of charity, when we impute the broad catholicity of Christianity to these early Jews.* The traditions of his people, national feeling, education, all that distinguished the true Israelite, against this journey and sojourn. But he broke through all. Does not seem to have had any fear of dwelling among an idolatrous nation.

The danger subtle, unseen, often unrealized, but as often deadly. Malarias are dangerous just because they do not address themselves to any of the senses.

Notice—

I. That the present choice may influence all the after life.

A mistake to put Elimelech outside the pale of ultimate salvation. But short of this, much which is instructive.

(*a*) *A man's error may be foolish without being final.* Seems to be so here. The first of a succession of disasters. Peter's denial a better example. So with the disciple's cowardice, Jonah's fleeing to Tarshish, etc.

(*b*) *But a tendency in one false step to lead to a second, to a continuance in folly.* Peter's first denial led to a second, to a third. Here, journeying to Moab ends in dwelling there. Elimelech went to sojourn for awhile, the same reason led him to continue. The first temptation was *to go*, the second would naturally be *to remain.* Note. *Habit makes the sin of the past the "easily besetting sin."* Lot lingered in Sodom; what wonder he afterwards lingered in Zoar? (Gen. xix. 16, 19—23).

II. That after a false step in life, God's mercies are not wholly denied us. Elimelech was protected in journeying. The Moabites seem to have received him and his family with great kindness (cf. Deut. xxiii. 3, as shewing it might have been otherwise). Good also out of what may have been evil, in the case of Ruth.

(*a*) *Divine providences seem to descend to our human levels.* Follow even into Moab. God does not forsake His children in the hour of their folly. More strange still, the wicked are provided for in the midst of their wickedness (Matt. v. 45). Households which have become careless and godless have some place of refuge opening to them in the hour of need. We fail to embrace the wise guidance offered to-day; His hand is stretched out again on the morrow. Step by step we descend lower and still lower in the way of moral rectitude; His gospel can meet us in the last hour with the offers of salvation and mercy. Note. *This should give no encouragement to men in going towards Moab, but may save us from despair if we are there.* The folly which sins that grace may abound possibly finds a warning in the context.

(*b*) *Men condemn, and so think themselves justified in neglecting; it is not so with God.*

After the Divine lament, "I have nourished up children, and they have rebelled against me—*gone away backwards*," comes the affectionate question of a father waiting to be reconciled, "Why should ye be stricken any more?" (Isa. i. 1—5.) Nay, more; He follows the terrible accusation, "Your hands are full of blood," with the tender appeal, "Come now, let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet," etc. (Isa. i. 15—18). No condemnation like His upon every soul that sinneth, and *no compassion like His.* It is this that gives point to the Divine declaration, "My ways are not your ways," etc. (See context, Isa. lv. 8.) So with Elimelech in Moab. Doubtless mercy followed while justice condemned. His piety may have been the "smoking flax" and the "bruised reed." Rest assured it was neither "quenched" nor "broken."

IMPROVEMENT.—To us the world offers its Moab continually. Forgetfulness of God is that far-off land (*Augustine*). Note. *The filial spirit has died out in the breast of every prodigal before he leaves his father's house.* Distance from God is not in space, but in affections (*Bede*). Apostacy of the heart always goes before apostacy of the life. Is thy heart right? the important question. If not, the land of promise will sooner or later be the land of penury,—Bethlehem itself a place of weariness and want. To such, life cannot be otherwise than a sad departure from the heritage of God.

Another treatment of the same text.

Theme.—THE WANDERERS.

> "I see that all are wanderers, gone astray,
> Each in his own delusion; they are lost
> In chase of fancied happiness, still woo'd,
> And never won."—*Cowper.*

The history of Ruth begins with a story of wanderers from God—a sad but not strange commencement (*Tyng*). A common story (*a*) in God's Word; (*b*) in human experience. We, too, know of a spiritual wandering from God, from His Word, from His Spirit, from His church and sanctuary, from His gospel, from Bethlehem, where Jesus is. A wandering more sad and fatal than this in the text. Those who go out "full," to return like the prodigal in want (Luke xv. 17), in bitterness of spirit (Ruth i. 20), having lost all. Or, sadder still, *who never return.* Jonah a wanderer, Manasseh, Demas. Nay, all men by nature wanderers (Isa. liii. 6). The wicked are emphatically called "wandering stars" (Jude 13).

I. See in what this wandering begins.

(*a*) *Led by distrust rather than by immediate want.* (See previous outlines.)

(*b*) *By sight rather than by faith.* No Divine voice comes to Elimelech, "Get thee out of thy country," as to Abraham (Gen. xii. 1), or as to Joseph, "Arise," etc. (Matt. ii. 20). No pillar of fire and cloud leads, as with Israel departing from Egypt. On the other hand, no angel stops the way, as with Balaam (Numb. xxii. 22—35). No miraculous providence hinders, as with Jonah. Probably his spiritual experience feeble and meagre, his life commonplace and unheroic. The better illustration of multitudes who wander away from sanctuary privileges. The very absence of the miraculous int hese critical moments, these times of choice, when life turns to the right hand or the left, itself suggestive. How many had to walk, even in those days, with nothing supernatural, nothing out of the ordinary, to guide; only the light of conscience. But faith can always speak, and did speak. Contrast Abraham's wandering with Elimelech's—this seeking a country with that mentioned in Heb. xi. Said of God's heroes, they became strangers and pilgrims, but "by faith," and "seeking a *better* country" (Heb. xi. 16). Happy wandering and even sojourning in a strange country, when men can say they are "persuaded," etc. (*ib.* 13). But sad when men leave Bethlehem for Moab, go out but to sojourn for awhile, and *continue there.*

(*c*) *By discontent rather than duty.* A common frame of mind with men, and the secret of much of our unrest. The unstable are always dissatisfied. Clouds without water are driven to and fro with every wind, and ships without ballast liable to the violence of every tempest (*Westminster Conf. of Faith*). Cain's *envy* made him a wanderer. (See also Outline III., ver. 1, div. II.)

II. See where this wandering leads. As in the parable, the son goes to hire himself in the far country. Possibly with Elimelech, also, wandering brought want. If so, another sentence may apply, "He would fain have filled his belly—and no man gave unto him." The peril in Moab as real, though no las apparent, as that in Bethlehem; perhaps more real. The one a famine, the other a scarcity of all those things by which men truly live. Countless avenues besides famine to the human heart (*Lawson*). Which was the best, bread or faith, to have abundance or to have God? (*Robertson.*)

Note. *We need never go far to sojourn in Moab* (*Tyng*).

III. See how this wandering ends.

Notice (*a*) *Journeying to Moab often means continuing in Moab, dying in Moab.* Not said, that the Lord was with him, as with Joseph in Egypt. If so, all would have been well. Not said, how he lived, or even how he died. His life afterwards summed up in one short sentence, "*He continued there.*" Whatever his state of mind and circumstances, they became fixed, permanent.

Notice (*b*) *That for some men there is no returning in life.* HE DIED THERE. How much then may depend upon the moment's choice! this present false step from the path of duty: all time; nay more, *all eternity.* In every sinful life, critical moments when the wandering begins. In that moment the path is turned aside, the bias given, and *for ever it may be.*

IMPROVEMENT.—Are we free agents? and do we choose our own path in life? God chooses the circumstances that surround it. And He has said the way of transgressors is hard. To the sinful He says, "*Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns*" (Hos. ii. 6). Are we froward? He will shew Himself froward (Ps. xviii. 26). Do we walk contrary to Him? He will walk contrary to us (Lev. xxvi. 23, 24, 27, 28). Wandering from God means strife with God—a folly, a gigantic mistake (Isa. xlv. 9.)

Bernard observes on these passages—

I. God, intending good to some in His secret counsels, may prosper that which others undertake with no good warrant. Elimelech's misfortunes and sojourn in Moab the means of blessing Ruth. So also Jacob's sons, in selling Joseph into Egypt, were providing a refuge for the family. Christ's cruel death the world's salvation.

II. That if men live where idolaters be, it is good to avoid the occasion of infection as much as may be. Some conjecture that Elimelech went not into the cities of the Moabites, but dwelt in tents. (Translate Fields of Moab. See notes on ver. 1.)

III. That none are so churlish and unkind at one time to some, but God can incline their hearts at another time to others. These Moabites formerly hard-hearted to Israel.

IV. That it is a praiseworthy matter to be harboursome to strangers. The barbarians commended (Acts xxviii. 2, 7, 10), who received the apostle. Abraham, Lot, and Job praised for this. We are exhorted to it (Heb. xiii. 2; Rom. xii. 20).

"What made it wrong for Elimelech to migrate to Moab, wrong according to the Old Testament standard, was that he was abandoning his place among the elect people to sojourn among heathen, whose social life, whose very worship, was unutterably licentious and degrading. . . . True, he is not directly blamed for his error in the book of Ruth, which is written in the most considerate and generous tone throughout; but that the writer of the book thought him to blame, and held the calamities which fell on him and his house to be a judgment on his sin, there is scarcely room to doubt."—*Cox.*

"Oh these wanderings from sanctuary privileges and home delights, how lightly begun, how disastrous in the ending! There are those to-day who are flitting about like the poor dove from Noah's ark, and finding no rest for the sole of the foot; spirits wandering self-tormented in desert places, and among the tombs, like that poor demoniac of old. And Christ's message to such is as then, 'Return unto thine own house, among thy kinsfolk and acquaintances, show forth what things God had done for thee.'"—*B.*

"Like wandering birds driven from their nest; like wandering stars rushing into darkness; like waves of the sea driven of the wind and tossed. Thus we wander in sin, we know not where, we know not to what. Forsaking the fountain of living water, we hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."—*Tyng.*

"To grasp at happiness is all our view;
Through different tracks her footsteps we pursue;
While each his own fallacious path approves,
As interest leads, or inclination moves;
Yet most through error lose the wished-for way:
Who sets out wrong must wander far astray."

"For everywhere he is a Judas, with whom his worldly interest, his worldly ambition, prevail over his attachment to Christ and to Christ's cause."—*Dr. Hanna.*

"It was said of Athens, that it was 'a good place to pass through, but a dangerous place to linger in.' To the faithful Israelite, Moab could have been no more than this. But it is written of Elimelech, 'He continued there.'

"As you value your souls, beware of the world: it has slain its thousands and ten thousands. What ruined Lot's wife? the world. What ruined Achan? the world. What ruined Haman? the world. What ruined Judas? the world. What ruined Simon Magus? the world. What ruined Demas? the world. And what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

"Why should the professor of Christianity be found eagerly pursuing those trifles which even heathen have been found fleeing from? The world is rather a sharp briar to wound us, than a sweet flower to delight us."—*Secker.*

"Ages have passed away; yet Moab exists in the shape of the world, its pleasures, its follies and vanities; the lust of the eye, the pride of life, the love of the world, that is Moab."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"Let us not therefore abuse strangers, and make a prey of them, making an advantage of their unskilfulness in the language, and being unacquainted with the fashions of the land; like Laban that deceived his nephew Jacob in placing Leah for Rachel, and, to cloak his cheating, pleaded it was the custom of the country."—*Fuller.*

"Romulus is said to have been nursed of a she-wolf; Hieron, king of Syracuse, by bees; Semiramis, of birds; Habides, king of Tartesius, of a hind; Cyrus the Persian, of a bitch; Pelias, of a mare; Paris, of a bear. . . . We know how the Lord commended the strange Samaritan beyond the priest and the Levite, because he succoured the poor wounded Jew which had fallen among thieves."—*Topsell.*

VERSES 3—5.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 3. **And Elimelech . . . died.** The conjunction seems to intimate shortly after his arrival. Certainly before the marriage of his sons. Josephus thinks, however, towards the end of the ten years' sojourn.

Ver. 4. **And they took them wives.** The verb, though not Chaldaic, said to be peculiar to

the later Hebrew, but found Judges xxi. 23 (*Speaker's Com.*). Always used in a bad sense (*Kitto*). **Of the women of Moab.** And they transgressed the decree of the Lord, and married foreign wives, etc. (*Chaldee Paraphrast*). Probably justified by necessity (*Speaker's Com.*). In violation of the Mosaic Law (*Lange*). Marriages with Moabitish women not forbidden like marriages with Canaanites in Deut. vii. 3 (*Keil*). Bertheau, Le Clerc, and others defend the act. Aben Ezra thinks that Orpah and Ruth were proselytes. Why make excuses for them? for Scripture does in no way represent them as holy men (*Serarius, a Roman Catholic expositor*). Traditum ferunt Judæi Ammonitam et Moabitam quidem semper fuisse interdictos, at feminas eorum statim permissas (*Midrash Tillim*). **The name of the one (*was*) Orpah.** Previous names genuine Hebrew, these cannot satisfactorily be explained from the Heb. (*Keil*). Means, turning the back? (*Keil*), a hind (*Haller, Simonis*), a mane (*Gesen.*), liberality (*Wright*). **Ruth,** Ancestress of the Singer (*Dante*). A Jewish tradition that Ruth was the daughter of Eglon, king of Moab. Chaldee paraphrast adopts it. A higher honour in that, like Eve, she is to be mother of the chosen seed. God not only wrote her name in the book of life in heaven, but also prefixed her name before a book of life on earth (*Fuller*). Means vision or beauty (*Gesen.*). Either to be considered a contraction for רְאוּת, appearance, beauty; or still better, as a contraction for רֵעוּת, a female friend, or as an abstract friendship (*Wright*). A conjecture that Ruth is an ancient form of the Greek ῥοδον, the Latin *rosa*, redness (*Lange, Cox*).

It is imagined, and not without probability, that Mahlon and Chilion are the same as Joash and Seraph, who married in Moab (1 Chron. iv. 22).—*Adam Clarke.* So *Aben Ezra.*

Ver. 5. **And Mahlon and Chilion died.** Cut short because they married strange women (*Chaldee Paraphrast*). Wright translates, and also the two of them died. The וגם carries us back to ver. 3. **Was left of (from). Was bereaved of.** "Almonah," which we render widow, signifies "*dumb*" (*Macgowan*).

VERSE 3.

Theme.—THE FIRST BREACH IN THE FAMILY CIRCLE.

> "There never breathed a man who when his life
> Was closing, might not of that life relate
> Toils long and hard."—*Wordsworth.*

And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died.

The story grows intensely sad (*Braden*). Death steps in here as elsewhere. They had escaped one danger only to fall into another sorrow. How true the narrative is to human experiences! The text eloquent in its simplicity, the chapter full of those contrasting lights and shadows which cling to human history.

I. See how much there is uncertain in connection with life. (*a*) *As to its circumstances.* I have seldom seen a tree thrive that hath been transplanted when it was old (*Fuller*). Changing our place is not always mending it (*M. Henry*). Could Elimelech have foreseen this end of all his wanderings, would he have undertaken the journey? But no! he went forward as we do. (*b*) *As to its character.* Different estimates as to this. Cox says, "He lost his life while seeking a livelihood—found a grave where he sought a home—judgment apparently treading on the very heels of offence." But——? Those actions not ungodly which are unsuccessful, nor those pious which are prosperous (*Fuller*). He would have died, whether he sinned or not, in coming to Moab. The lawfulness of an action is not to be gathered from the joyfulness of the event, but from the justness of the cause for which it is undertaken (*Fuller*). Poor man to suffer want in his life, and be maligned after death (*Braden*). Note. *Something of this uncertainty invests every life.* We are mysteries one to another—our actions but imperfectly understood, our characters imperfectly estimated, our lives misread. Christ says, Judge not, etc. (Matt. vii. 1). (*c*) *As to its continuance.* We know not what a day, etc. The only thing certain in that future is death. (*α*) *We cannot escape it.* Elimelech could avoid the arrows of famine in Israel, yet he could not shun the darts of death in Moab. (*β*) *We cannot prevent it.* With this man the journey accomplished, the project seemingly successful; but what of that? He that *lived* in a place of penury *must die* in a land of plenty (*Fuller*). Note. *With*

Elimelech the mystery of sorrow and exile ends in the crowning mystery of death. The first journey to Moab, at his own desire, his own time; the second unexpectedly at God's.

II. See how much there may be uncertain in connection with death. The Bible tells us very little of the closing scene (*Robertson*). One short sentence here concludes the history. (*a*) *We know little of this man's life.* Was he one of those—

> "Whom unmerciful disaster
> Followed fast and followed faster"?

Then a warning to the afflicted, that sorrows bring no exemption from death. Was he one who wandering sinfully, always purposed to return? A lesson to the procrastinator here. Or one having taken the false step, and for whom there is no repentance, no return? Then an example of God's dealings with the reprobate. (*b*) *We know less of his death.* Simply the place, and possibly the time. He died in the place to which he had wandered from Bethlehem, and in all probability just as he conceived his purpose in coming there accomplished. (*c*) *We know nothing of his eternal destiny.* Multitudes live like this, die like this, die and "give no sign." The life such that you can form but an imperfect estimate of the character and the destiny—only hope the larger charitable hope, which rests upon the infinite mercy of God. The death sudden, or from attendant circumstances such as to give no chance of forming a judgment. Note. *To be uncertain on some questions is itself decisive.* Christ says, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. xii. 30). The uncertainty here may be merely historic. Instructive even then.

"Once in the flight of ages past
There lived a man, and who was he?
Mortal, howe'er thy lot be cast,
That man resembles thee.

* * * *

He suffered—but his pangs are o'er;
Enjoyed—but his delights are fled;
Had friends—his friends are now no more,
And foes—his foes are dead.

* * * *

He saw whatever thou hast seen;
Encountered all that troubles thee;
He was—whatever thou hast been;
He is—what thou shalt be.

* * * *

The rolling seasons, day and night,
Sun, moon, and stars, the earth and main,
Erewhile his portion, life and light,
To him exist in vain.

* * * *

The annals of the human race,
Their ruins, since the world began,
Of him afford no other trace
Than this—there lived a man."

Montgomery.

IMPROVEMENT.—When life is past, it is all one whether it has lasted two hundred years or fifty (*Dr. Newman*). Death levels all distinctions, thwarts the best laid plans, will come in with us as with Elimelech, to write vanity across our most cunningly laid schemes. What is our life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away. Learn (*a*) amid the many trials of life to remember the greatest is yet to come. (*b*) Before the want we dread, death itself may be here. (*c*) Are you obliged to leave your native fields? you may have to leave the world itself (*Lawson*).

"Which, I wonder, is the better lot, to die prosperous and famous, or poor and disappointed? To have, and to be forced to yield; or to sink out of life, having played and lost the game? That must be a strange feeling, when a day of our life comes, and we say, '*To-morrow*, success or failure won't matter much; and the sun will rise, and all the myriads of mankind go to their work or their pleasure as usual; but I shall be out of the turmoil.'"—*Thackeray.*

"When Socrates was urged by his friends to escape from the prison where he was condemned to die, he answered, 'Tell me of a land where men do not die, and I will escape to that.'"—*Tyng.*

"There is a tradition of an Indian chief, who, with his tribe, fled before the prairie fires, till he had crossed a broad river, when he struck his tent-pole into the ground, and cried 'Alabama!' (Here we may rest!) He was no prophet. Hostile tribes overpowered them; and they found only graves where they sought a home. This is, maybe, a parable of the soul; for it earth has no Alabama."—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

"Death is a friend of ours; and he that is not ready to entertain him is not at home."—*Lord Bacon.*

"Death argues not displeasure; because he whom God loved best died first."—*Bishop Hall.*

"It is hard to die when the time is not ripe. When it is, it will be easy. We need not die while we are living."—*Beecher.*

"It is said that Guerricus, hearing the passage read in church, beginning, 'And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years,' and ending 'the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty and nine years, and he died,' went home and began immediately to prepare for death.

"The ashes of an oak in a chimney are no epitaph of that to tell me how high or how large that was, what flocks it sheltered while it stood, what men it hurt when it fell. The dust of great men's graves is speechless too; it says nothing; it distinguishes nothing."—*Donne.*

"There is a moment when a man's life is re-lived on earth. It is in that hour when the coffin-lid is shut down just before the funeral, when earth has seen the last of him for ever. Then the whole life is, as it were, lived over again in the conversation which turns upon the memory of the departed. . . . For the most part, when all is over, general opinion is not far from the truth. Misrepresentation and envy have no provocation left them. What the departed was is tolerably well known in the circle in which he moved."—*Robertson, "Israelites' Grave in a Foreign Land."*

"'May it please your Majesty, Jenkyn has got his liberty.' Upon which the king asked with eagerness, 'Aye, who gave it to him?' The nobleman replied, 'A greater than your Majesty, the King of kings;' with which the king seemed greatly struck, and remained silent."—*Death of the Rev. W. Jenkyn*, 1685.

"Death does not always give warning beforehand; sometimes he gives the mortal blow suddenly—he comes behind with his dart, and strikes. . . . Eutychus fell down dead; death suddenly arrested David's sons and Job's sons; Augustine died in a compliment; Galba with a sentence; Vespasian with a jest; Zeuxis died laughing at a picture of an old woman which he drew with his own hands; Sophocles was choked with a stone in a grape."—*Brooks.*

"A man may escape the wars by pleading privilege of years, or weakness of body, or the king's protection, or by sending another in his room; but in this war the press is so strict, that it admits no dispensation. Young or old, weak or strong, willing or unwilling, all is one, into the field we must go, and look that last enemy in the face. It is in vain to think of sending another in our room, for no man dieth by proxy; or to think of compounding with death, as those self-deluded fools did (Ps. xxviii. 5) who thought they had been discharged of the debt by seeing the sergeant. No, there is no discharge in that war."—*Flavel.*

"Nihil prodest ora concludere et vitam fugientem retinere."—*Hierom.*

"Where men think to preserve life, there they may lose it as Elimelech; fleeing from the famine in Israel, he died where plenty was in Moab."—*Bernard.*

"No outward plenty can privilege us from death. . . . God can easily frustrate our fairest hopes, and defeat our most probable projects, in making those places most dangerous which we account most safe and secure; causing death to meet us there where we think furthest to fly from it."—*Fuller.*

And she was left, and her two sons.

Another instance of the wonderful subservience of the events of human life to the righteous purposes of God. God deals with Naomi in this way; not in anger, but in love. *Recognize the Divine agency, and see something of the Divine plan.* First famine, then exile, then bereavement. Naomi a Christian, but what is called a backsliding Christian; one under a cloud, one who had proved to some extent untrue, undutiful, unthankful; bitterly chastened, and therefore eventually reinstated in her forfeited privileges (*Dr. Cumming*). Not necessary to take this view of her character in looking for a Divine purpose in this sad event. Whom the Lord *loveth* he *chasteneth* (Heb. xii. 6). Bereavements *natural, inevitable, common, familiar.* None the less they have a meaning, and come to us pregnant with important lessons.

I. See how much there was that must have seemed severe in this bereavement. Naomi left a widow—the husband, friend, counsellor, head of the household, *gone.* The widow's lot always a bitter and lonely one. Especially so here. Naomi a widow in a strange land—far from home and sanctuary. Notice. (*a*) *That sorrow is natural under circumstances like these.* A mistaken notion to think that grief in itself is sinful. It is undue, rebellious sorrow which is to be rebuked, sorrow without faith, grief which sees no future, nothing beyond the past and the present. One pregnant instance at least of a holy sorrow at the grave, "Jesus

wept." (*b*) *That affection for those taken away is still natural.* Unreasonable to think that the family bond is broken at death. They are "loved ones" still, though "loved ones gone before." A danger in this. Affection at these times may become morbid, a matter of mere sentiment. Modern spiritualism in many family circles the perversion of what is in itself true and right; love for the dead, and then a craving for a material manifestation of the loved ones. Note. *It is not the intensity of our affection, but its interference with truth and duty, which makes it sinful.* No man ever loved child or brother or sister too much (*Robertson*). (*c*) *That religion comes in to sanctify alike the sorrow and the affection.* It says of those taken away, "Blessed are the dead," etc. (Rev. xiv. 13), and of the faithful remaining, "We which are alive shall be caught up together with them: so shall we ever," etc. (1 Thess. iv. 17). Perhaps we never love truly until we learn to love with all the deep fulness of a sanctified affection. Especially is this true in circumstances like those in the text. That higher affection sustains and elevates the lower human one, casting round it a glory which mere personal feeling could never give (*Robertson*).

II. **See how much there was especially to be regretted in this bereavement.** To pass beyond the great loss itself. To the mother a multiplicity of new cares and anxieties involved (*a*) *in the training up of her fatherless offspring.* A mother's task always a difficult one. Much more then a widowed mother's. The strong commanding voice hushed in death. The will which ought to be the supreme authority in the household missing. Possibly this one reason why Paul lays stress upon widows who have children learning "*first to shew piety at home*" (1 Tim. v. 4). This the more necessary since the father's character and influence is absent. (*b*) *In doing this amid the surrounding circumstances.* Journeying to Moab involved much, and perhaps nothing more serious than this. A cheerless prospect to Elimelech in dying, this of leaving his widow and orphans among strangers and heathen, and well for him only if he had strong faith in the God of the fatherless (Ps. xxvii. 10). Even Elimelech must have known His promise: "If they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry" (Exod. xxii. 23). Note. (1) *A caution to those who have kindred responsibilities.* When you choose your place of abode, if you have families, let this be one principal consideration, where you will leave them if God should call you out of the world (*Lawson*). (2) *A warning to Christians who lead their children into the midst of worldly surroundings.* We wonder sometimes why the children of sainted parents fail to grow up in the fear of God. The secret here and in this: led into the world, and left there, as Elimelech's children in Moab.

III. **See how much there was merciful, after all, in connection with this bereavement.** Her children left to her. The family circle broken into, but not destroyed. Two sons to support her declining years. And by-and-by Orpah and Ruth are introduced into the bereaved household. Note. The wonderful way in which the breaches made by death are repaired by Divine mercy, now and always. The family circle, like the ark of Noah, survives amid the wasting waters of universal change (*Dr. Lee*).

Doubtless the affliction itself had its spiritual use. Preparatory to the "I will arise" (ver. 6). Manasseh's woes drove that erring monarch to God (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12). With the righteous, grief makes sacred. Joy may elevate, ambition glorify, but sorrow alone can consecrate (*H. Gresby*).

Bernard on this verse—

And Elimelech . . . . died.

I. That death is the end of all, and spareth none (Job xxi. 33; Eccles. vii. 2, vi. 6; 1 Cor. xv. 51); for all have sinned (Rom. v.); and death is the reward of sin (Rom. vi.).

II. That a full supply of bodily wants cannot prevent death. This man in Moab, where there was food enough. The rich glutton also (Luke xvi. 22). The rich man with his barns full (Luke xii. 20). Life

depends not upon the outward means, for then the rich and mighty would never die.

III. That where men think to preserve life, there they may lose it. Fleeing from famine in Israel, this man died where plenty was, in Moab. Where we may count ourselves secure, there death may take us away.

Naomi's husband.

I. That it is a grace to be called the husband of some women. Such an one is a crown to her husband (Prov. xii. 4). The foolish woman rottenness to his bones (Prov. xii. 4).

II. That grace in one prevents not death in another. Married persons not appointed the same length of days. We come not together, and we go not together.

III. That it is a great cross for a woman to lose a good husband. In this the wife loses her head, her guide, her stay and comfort.

And she was left, and her two sons.

I. That albeit death is due to all, yet it seizeth not upon all at once.

II. That the Lord in afflicting His children sweeteneth the same with some comforts. In dealing with Naomi, He took away her husband, yet left her two sons; and afterwards, when He took them away, gave her an excellent daughter-in-law. A bitter affliction for Joseph to be sold of his brethren, but it was sweetened with Potiphar's favour.

"Bereavements at home are sorrowful enough, even when the tenderest sympathy beams from the eyes of friends, and all those gentle healing agencies which love has ever at command are striving to bind up the broken heart. But to bury one's precious dead in a foreign country, away from all the blessed associations of home, is a test under which the strongest spirit may well bow down."—*Braden.*

"For by the hearth the children sit
Cold in the atmosphere of death,
And scarce endure to draw the breath,
Or like to noiseless phantoms flit.
But open converse is there none,
So much the vital spirits sink,
To see the vacant chair, and think
How good! how kind! and he is gone."
Tennyson.

"Here we see how mercifully God dealt with Naomi, in that He quenched not all the sparks of her comfort at once; but though He took away the stock, He left her the stems; though He deprived her, as it were, of the use of her own legs, by taking away her husband, yet He left her a staff in each of her hands, her two sons, to support her. Indeed, afterwards He took them away; but first He provided her a gracious daughter-in-law. Whence we learn, God poureth not all His afflictions at once, but ever leaveth a little comfort; otherwise we should not only be pressed down, but crushed to powder under the weight of His heavy hand."—*Fuller.*

"Life passes, riches fly away, popularity is fickle, the senses decay, the world changes, friends die. One alone is constant; One alone is true to us; One alone *can* be true."—*Dr. Newman.*

"God out of these things is bringing forth in us that diviner tenderness which can only characterize the matured and chastened Christian. The time is indeed short, and it is well for us to be made to feel it."—*B.*

"Suffering in this world is both remedial and penal. When it is rightly received, it is remedial. When it is resisted, it becomes penal to him who resists, and admonitory to the spectator. . . . There are two ways of escaping from suffering—the one by rising above the causes of conflict; the other by sinking below them. The one is the religious method; the other is the vulgar, worldly method. The one is called Christian elevation, the other stoicism."—*Beecher.*

"When the bridge is finished, the timbers and scaffolding upon which it has rested are all removed. So God is removing these earthly props of ours, one after another, and for two reasons as regards ourselves. First, that we may learn the great lesson of self-reliance in human life, but chiefly that we may learn to rest above all on Him."—*B.*

VERSE 4.

Theme.—MARRIAGES IN MOAB.

"Honest wedlock
Is like a banqueting-house, built in a garden,
On which the spring flowers take delight
To cast their modest odours."

And they took them wives of the women of Moab.

The father's death did not arouse these Israelites in their wanderings. The sons thinking of marrying when possibly they ought to have been thinking of returning. Note. (*a*) *Every cross bringeth not men home again* (*Bernard*). First the loss of the father, then the marriage of the sons, the wedding feast seemingly following hard upon the funeral. How true to human life! Note (*b*) *Sojourning in Moab meant friendship with the Moabites, marriage with their children.* Little else could be expected. [The Old Testament seems to intimate that the daughters of Moab were fair to look upon.] The two sons in Moab did as Moab did,—married Gentile women, not caring whether they were idolaters or not (*Dr. Cumming*). Is this the explanation? or is it that Elimelech and his family were, after all, lights in the midst of a croked and perverse generation?—attracted Ruth and even Orpah for a while. New joys indeed in store for Naomi, yet these mingled with many anxious questionings, which a godly parent's experience alone may interpret.

I. Take the brighter and more charitable view of these marriages. The act simply considered *as following out the usual course of human life* not at all reprehensible. Rather to be viewed favourably—the loss of one comfort supplied by the enjoyment of another. *Judged by its circumstances and surroundings*, much to be said in its defence. The main question of right and wrong lies farther back, as to whether they were justified in coming to Moab. Lawful for Israelites to marry foreign women under certain exceptional circumstances, as, *e.g.*, those taken in war (Deut. xxi. 10, 11). No direct command against Moabitish women, as against the Canaanites (Deut. vii. 3). Better marry than do worse. *Judged by its results*, the answer favourable. Salmon did well in taking Rahab. Mahlon could have found no less a treasure in Ruth. By this act the young men did much to endear themselves to a people who had evidently received them kindly. Orpah and Ruth, wild branches—it was something to graft them upon the stock of the true Israel. (Cf. 1 Cor. vii. 13, 14.)

II. Look at the darker possibilities connected with marriages like these. Bishop Hall strongly condemns such unions (see "Contemplations," vol. i., pp. 210, 211). Note. (*a*) *Does not appear that the godly mother had any hand in the matter.* Seemingly their own act: "They took them wives." The influence which won over Ruth may have belonged to after years, and to Naomi's character and life (ii. 12). The sons themselves possibly having lost all which ought to distinguish the true Israelite. Such marriages fraught with great danger, even if overruled for good. The decisive step taken, and the future has to decide whether for good or evil. Note. (*b*) In the most favourable view, *these young men to blame, unless they had credible evidence their future wives were cordially disposed towards the worship of God.* The wife's influence often more subtle, and even more powerful and lasting in religious matters, than the husband's. The strength of Samson, the wisdom of Solomon, not sufficient to withstand it when used for evil. Note. (*c*) *Impossible to say what was the effect upon the young men themselves.* Judging from the influence of Eve over Adam, etc., we fear it was evil (*Dr. Cumming*). Would naturally tend to lengthen the sojourn in Moab. Mahlon and Chilion exceptionally fortunate in their wives (*Cox*). Strange if they should have deteriorated, while Orpah and Ruth were benefited; yet not impossible—not unlikely. Characters assimilate, mutually act and react upon each other—give and take, especially when the bond is as close as that of marriage.

III. Improvement. To the Christian the command is, "Be not unequally yoked," etc. (2 Cor. vi. 14). His privilege "to marry in the Lord." This safe—without offence—within the sphere of the promises. (See next outline.)

Braden on this:—

Mahlon married Ruth, Chilion Orpah. Little is known of either, perhaps they were sisters—the parents' names not mentioned. Both natives of Moab, and heathen—appear to have remained so while in their own land. (See i. 15.)

The question asked, *Were these two young men right in marrying heathen women?* Some writers justify, others condemn. A plausible case can be made out in their favour: great distance from Bethlehem, absence of Jewish maidens, uncertainty of their return. naturally diminished interest in their native land, arising from long residence in Moab, the fact that there was no distinct commandment against marrying a Moabitess, though there was against marrying a Canaanite—all good reasons for pleading on their behalf. More, Boaz married Ruth afterwards, and God made her ancestress of Christ. Yet were not absolutely free from blame. God overruled for good, still they erred. This nation under a curse, excluded from the Jews (Deut. xxiii. 3). Ezra rent his garment, etc., under similar circumstances (Ezra ix.). No doubt, to marry a heathen a sin in the eyes of the Jew.

A practical question started: *Should a professing Christian marry one who makes no such profession?* "Whatsoever is not of faith is of sin." If you are not firmly convinced the step is right, then for you it is sin. Does the N. T. lay down any law? *No direct utterance* on the subject to be discovered. Paul's warning (2 Cor. vi. 14), "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers," etc., often quoted against such mixed marriages, but does not specifically refer to them. The apostle arguing as to the whole relationship of life, urging that the Christian Church should be separated from heathen associations. The greater, however, included in the less. The law applicable to the entire life peculiarly touches marriage.

It may be answered, "Times have changed, the broad line of demarcation between believer and unbeliever no longer exists. Heathen are not found among us; non-professors moral and reputable in life, and can hardly be designated "unbelievers." True, no doubt. The lines between the Church and the world faded, a mutual movement towards each other. Many see no wrong in marrying one who appears to be everything but a professor of religion. A mistake to burden consciences by asserting that any course of conduct is sinful if the vexed matter is fairly open to doubt. Tends to produce a reaction, in which sacred principles are themselves thrown aside.

This, however, may be maintained, *that mixed marriages are eminently inexpedient and very dangerous.* A want of sympathetic religious convictions between husband and wife injuriously affects their sacred relationship. True marriage rests on common admiration and sympathy—a union of hearts. If religion, which concerns the deepest emotions and noblest thoughts, is excluded, the union disastrously incomplete, the real foundation insecure. Love which rises from other things meagre, partial, unsatisfactory—the richest cords of the soul untouched. That which one esteems as *the best thing in life*, the other may not possess—a perpetual craving for sympathy where it cannot be given. The hindrances and sorrows springing from this spiritual isolation incalculable. *Man and wife do not understand each other.* Look at numberless experiences from opposite standpoints—motives imputed, sneers at saintliness uttered perhaps on one side, and denunciations at godlessness on the other. Multitudes of *family quarrels arise from want of spiritual union*, and the highest aspirations of the godly soul perpetually thwarted. Then *the education of the children perplexing;* the example of the one nullified by the conduct of the other. To marry an unbelieving husband or wife may involve the future destiny of the offspring. If the children grow up in the fear of God, it will be in spite of the bad example of one parent.

It may be said *that many wed hoping to produce a change.* They may be instrumental in the conversion of the beloved one—a beautiful but most delusive hope. Can instances be quoted? Their scarcity contrasts most painfully with the multitude of failures. *Religious influence generally less after marriage than before.* The charm strangely disappears, the same words irritate. More difficult to speak upon these themes, lest there should be some taunt about inconsistency. Easier to address strangers about Christ, than our own households. The home friends know our failings—do not see our struggles against them. Decision for God the great pre-requisite for a happy and useful marriage, far better than beauty—intellect—wealth.

(Condensed by permission from "The Beautiful Gleaner.")

"Here we see the fashion of the world. Mankind had long ago decayed, if those breaches which are daily made by death were not daily made up by marriage."—*Fuller.*

"And thus the world moves on—deaths and marriages, marriages and deaths. The household which to-day mourns as though all joy had taken flight for ever, to-morrow resounds with the laughter of many voices at a new-born happiness. The faces all tear-stained yesterday are bright with smiles to-day. The bell which slowly tolled the funeral knell an hour ago, now rings out the joyous wedding-chime. So it must be, so it ought to be. Probably life would lose half its beauty but for this alternation of shadow and sunshine; at least, this we know, that human hearts need both the darkness and the light, or they will not grow to that perfection of truth and purity which God has designed they shall attain. Elimelech died, the sons married. It is a simple statement, yet a whole world of change is involved in it for that small household."—*Braden.*

"Hail, wedded love, mysterious law, true source
Of human offspring, sole propriety
In paradise of all things common else,
By thee adulterous lust was drawn from men
Among the bestial herds to range; by thee,
Founded on reason, loyal, just, and pure,
Relations dear and all the charities
Of father, son, and brother, first were known." *Milton.*

"Wherever found, women are the same kind, civil, obliging, human tender beings, inclined to be gay and cheerful, humorous and modest."—*Ledyard.*

"True marriage rests on common admiration and sympathy; it is the union of hearts in the bonds of holiest love. If, however, religion, which concerns the deepest emotions and noblest thoughts, is excluded, the union of the two natures is disastrously incomplete, the real foundation of married life becomes fearfully insecure."—*Braden.*

"Marriage has less of beauty, but more of safety, than the single life. It hath not more ease, but less danger; it is more merry and more sad; it is fuller of sorrows and fuller of joys; it lies under more burdens, but it is supported by all the strength of love and charity, and those burdens are delightful. . . . It is that state of good to which God hath designed the present constitution of the world."—*Jeremy Taylor.*

"The woman's cause is man's. They rise or sink
Together. Dwarfed or godlike, bond or free;
If she be small, slight-natured, miserable,
How shall men grow? . . . Let her be
All that not harms distinctive womanhood;
For woman is not undeveloped man,
But diverse. Could we make her as the man,
Sweet love were slain, whose dearest bond is this,
Not like to like, but like in difference;
Yet in the long years must they liker grow;
The man be more of woman, she of man,
* * * * *
Till at the last she set herself to man
Like perfect music unto noble words."
Tennyson.

"——An unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised;
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; and happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all, is, that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours, to be directed
As from her lord, her governor, her king."
Shakespeare.

"When a woman marries a man that is ungodly, wrong as it is, we may indulge a reasonable hope that he through her influence will become a Christian. But it rarely happens when a man marries a woman that is not a Christian, that she becomes a Christian; rather he sinks down to her moral level."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"A good wife is heaven's last, best gift to a man; his angel of mercy, minister of graces innumerable; his gem of many virtues, his casket of jewels."—*Jeremy Taylor.*

"No doubt it is a truism to say that in any case marriage is a solemn thing. We smile and jest over it; the prospect of a wedding always awakens good-humoured remark; festivities appropriately accompany the celebration; yet we cannot lose sight of the grave importance of the event itself. Two human beings of differing temperament and education stand before God and clasp hands, covenanting 'to be faithful even unto death.'

Henceforth the making or the marring of each other's happiness rests with that husband and wife. Henceforth they are bound by a tie strong as the law itself, and no discovery of incompatibility of character, no change of temporal circumstances, no mere inconveniences of position, only distinct criminal acts, can 'put asunder' 'what God hath joined together.' Well, therefore, does the Service declare that it should 'not be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.'"—*Braden.*

"Marriage is the best state for man in general; and every man is a worse man in proportion as he is unfit for the married state."—*Dr. Johnson.*

"He that goes far to marry, goes to be deceived or to deceive. The day you marry you kill or cure yourself."—*Spanish Proverbs.*

VERSE 5.

Theme.—THE SECOND GREAT BEREAVEMENT.

"Is God less God, that thou art left undone?
Rise, worship, bless Him, in this sackcloth spun,
As in that purple!"—*Mrs. Browning*

Then died these two also.

Thus far the book of Ruth resembles that symphony of Beethoven, in which the song of birds, the cheerful hum of a holiday crowd, . . . are hushed by the crash of a sudden and threatening storm (*Cox*). Scarcely so: all along there has been the undertone of sorrow, affliction following affliction. But we can imagine years of happy prosperity (possibly ten) in Moab, since the last great calamity (ver. 3). Now a further trial—to Naomi the climax of all which has gone before, a more terrible famine than that in the land of Israel.

I. We have Death here once again in the family circle. Three sepulchres now attest his melancholy ravages (*Ewlie*). This time the sons taken in the flush of manhood; not as the father, who might well have anticipated his end. Note. (*a*) *Even the young man's life a vapour.* Death no respecter of youth, or strength, or beauty. The blossom as subject to be nipped as the flower, the spark to be extinguished as the flame. Was it the "joy" and the "ornament" (see note on ver. 2) of this household God took, or the "weakly" and the "pining" ones? Was the death sudden, or ushered in by signs of failing strength, as the latter interpretation of the names would seem to intimate? The Scripture language severe in its brevity, but touching in its simplicity, "Then died these two *also*" (see notes)—died in banishment, from their fatherland, perhaps from their father's God. (*b*) *The young man's plans vanity.* Escaped famine, but death overtook them. Founded their houses in Moab, Moab became their grave (*Lange*). Probably determined not to return home until the famine was over; when it was, they themselves were no more (*Lange*).

II. We have separation once more in the household life. Husband from wife, children from a fond parent. With Naomi, first it had been separation from kinsfolk and acquaintances, then from husband, now from her sons. Thus the Divine hand is removing one after another the ties which bind her affections earthward. Note. *A warning against seeking unmitigated satisfaction in family joys.* We should live together as those who may be called upon to separate at any moment. Rather as those who look for a union beyond the separation (1 Thess. iv. 14).

"The love that rose on stronger wings,
Unpalsied when he met with Death,
Is comrade of the lesser faith,
That sees the course of human things,
* * * * *
That all, as in some piece of art,
Is toil co-operant to an end."—*Tennyson.*

III. We have still further separation in a foreign land. New afflictions

added to Naomi's former griefs—loss upon loss, trial following trial. The grief of the two younger widows not mentioned—speechless before a more majestic sorrow than its own. "And *the woman* was left of her two sons and her husband." The desolation of bereavement never more vividly pictured than by these touching phrases (*Braden*). To heighten the picture, what little wealth had remained would seem to have vanished. Poverty comes in upon them "like an armed man." Note. (*a*) *The case by no means singular, even though the afflictions are complicated.* Bereavement! in what household is the shadow unknown?

"Too common! never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.

The widow's story too familiar! Note. (*b*) *These providences mysterious—inscrutable.* Only on all theories of human life, the atheist's among the rest, they face us, and we must bow to them. Explain it or not, here is the fact. And happy those alone who can say, as Naomi appears to have done, "Although I have lost the gift, I have not lost the GIVER (*Dr. Cumming*). Faith only, though it be "but as a grain of mustard seed," can give consolation in such hours. Note. (*c*) *Some comfort remaining even to the most forlorn and desolate.* The sons' wives left in the household—human love side by side with Divine care.

"Oh weep no more! there yet is balm
In Gilead: love doth ever shed
Rich healing where it nestles, spread
O'er desert pillows some green palm.
God's ichor fills the hearts that bleed,
The best fruit loads the broken bough,
And in the wounds our sorrows plough,
Immortal love sows sovereign seed."—*Gerald Massey.*

Improvement. (*a*) When heavy calamities befall, beware of speaking or even thinking unadvisedly of them. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth," etc. (Gen. xviii. 25). Our best thoughts sometimes presumptuous on these matters. (*b*) The love or hatred of God not to be estimated by what we see of His doings. (*c*) Let none because of youth put far off the day of death (*Bernard*). The question of early death is one about which no like mystery hangs (*Braden*). Some He takes away from the evil of the world; others for reasons beyond our present knowledge and judgment. (*d*) *Those least expected may be most likely to go soonest.* Remember now, etc. (Eccl. xii. 1).

M. Henry on this:—

I. That wherever we go we cannot outrun death, whose fatal arrows fly in all places.

II. That we cannot expect to prosper when we go out of the way of our duty. He that will save his life by any indirect course shall lose it.

III. That death, when it comes into a family often, makes breach upon breach. One is taken away to prepare another to follow; that affliction not duly improved, God sends another of the same kind.

Bernard:—

That the Lord gave them time to marry and to enjoy their marriage for some space, though they made no better use of their father's death. Thus good and patient is God unto men for their bettering.

II. That when God hath proved men in patience, and they will not make right use thereof, then will He take them away.

III. That God can, and sometimes will, cut off young men in the flower of their youth. So Nadab, Abihu, Hophni and Phinehas, Amnon, etc. Some for their own sins, as Absalom; others for their father's, as David's child (2 Sam. xii. 14) and the sons of Saul.

[1] The end of one sorrow is the beginning of another, like the drops of rain distilling from the top of a house, when one is gone another followeth; like a ship upon the sea,

being on the top of one wave presently is cast down to the foot of another; like seed, which being spread by the sower is haunted by the fowls, being green and past their reach is endangered by frost and snow, being past the winter's hurt, by beasts in summer, being ripe is cut with the sickle, threshed with the flail, purged in the floor, ground in the mill, baked in the oven."—*Topsell.*

"The good husbandman may pluck his roses and gather in his lilies at midsummer, and for aught I dare say in the beginning of the first summer months; and he may transplant young trees out of the lower ground to the higher. What is that to you or me? The goods are his own."—*Rutherford.*

"With many it is ebb water before the tide be at the full. The lamps of their lives are wasted almost as soon as they are lighted. The sand of their hour-glass is run out when they think it is but newly turned."—*Secker.*

"Oh! these earthly separations from those we love, how terribly do they scald and wear the heart! day by day to see those things laid out, as it were, in such stony, death-like forms, which used to lie about here and there, in that sweet abandonment of daily life."—*Power.*

"'Death strikes with equal foot the rustic cottage and the palaces of kings.' After ten years, in which the members of this notable family seem to have opposed a constant face to the austere and threatening brow of misfortune, and to have grown the dearer to each other for the sorrows and calamities they shared together, Mahlon and Chilion, still young men, followed their father to the grave, and Naomi was left a childless widow. Songs of mirth were exchanged for songs of mourning. The three men of the household had gone to their long home, and the three bereaved women were left to weep together, and to comfort each other as best they might."—*Cox.*

"Even young men in the prime of their age are subject to death. The sons of Jacob, when they came to the table of Joseph, sat down, the eldest according to his age, and the youngest according to his youth: but Death observes not this method; he takes not men in seniority, but sometimes sends them first to the burial that came last from the birth, and those that came last from the womb, first to the winding-sheet."—*Fuller.*

"He the young, the strong, who cherished
Noble longings for the strife,
By the wayside fell and perished,
Weary with the march of life."
Longfellow.

"Hush! listen! let the heart in silence learn
How that of all things fair Time hath no certain hold:
The fairest flower, the greenest leaf, may fade.
Death is a ravening wolf, sparing no earthly fold."
B.

"Death is the solemn thought of the world. Let it be ever so vulgarized or common; still beneath the tent of the eastern emir, or in the crowded cemeteries of the capital, death is an awful arresting thing. While civilization has robbed other horrors of their wonder, death is still the insoluble event. But here we have something more than death; we have separation. . . . Death becomes awfully credible when those we are accustomed to live with die. We feel then as those tell us they have felt who have experienced an earthquake. The earth, the most stable of things, becomes to them unstable, and to us the solid life becomes hollow, and 'I may be the next' is the first thought."—*Robertson.*

"God keeps a niche
In heaven to hold our idols; and, albeit
He brake them to our faces and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them raised complete,
The dust swept from their beauty—glorified,
New Memnons singing in the great God-light."
Mrs. Browning.

"When you and I die, Providence will not be buried in our grave; the 'Redeemer liveth.' We entrust to Him our eternal life, shall we not entrust to Him our dearest earthly relatives? He will be a husband to my beloved wife, and a father to my children, when I can no longer look after them; His gracious presence will cheer them in solitude, shield them in danger, guide their inexperience through untrodden paths in the darkest night."—*Dr. Waugh.*

"Before we had the particular losses of Naomi, now we have them all reckoned up in the total sum. "A threefold cable," saith Solomon, "is not easily broken," and yet we see Naomi's threefold cable of comfort, twisted of her husband and her two sons, broken by death. Of the two sexes, the woman is the weaker; of women, old women are most feeble; of old women, widows most woful; of widows, those that are poor, their plight most pitiful; of poor widows, those that want children their case most doleful; of widows that want children, those that once had them and after lost them, their estate most desolate; of widows that have had children, those that are strangers in a foreign country, their condition most comfortless. Yet all these meet together in Naomi, as in the centre of sorrow, to make the measure of her misery 'pressed down, shaken together, running over.' I conclude, therefore, many men have had affliction—none like Job; many women have had tribulation—none like Naomi."—*Fuller.*

"High up the mountain slopes of Chamouni there is a plain covered with verdure and flowers. Thither the shepherds of the Alps drive their flocks. At one point of the ascent the rocks rise almost perpendicular,

When the flock arrives at this point, none is bold enough to venture; but the shepherds gather the lambs in their arms, and toss them upon the plain; the whole flock clambers after them, and soon is feeding upon the rich herbage, or ruminating beneath the 'rose-trees of the Alps.' Bereaved parents, the lamb of your love has been carried up, and beckons you to follow where are flowers sweeter than those of the Alps, and air and sunshine purer and brighter than is found up in Chamouni."—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

VERSES 6, 7.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—*Ver.* 6, 7. **Then [and] she arose.** She arose in order to return. Et surrexit ut in patriam pergeret (*Vulgate*). **With her daughters-in-law.** Both the young women set out with the intention of going to Bethlehem (*Bertheau and others*) **That she might return.** לָשׁוּב (to return) applies strictly and grammatically to Naomi only. **For she had heard.** By the mouth of an angel (*Targum*). The cause of her rising to return was not the death of her sons, but the message (*Speaker's Com.*). **That the Lord had visited,** etc. Because of the righteousness of Ibzan the judge, and because of the simplicity of the pious Boaz (*Targum*). פקד occurs repeatedly for such a return of Divine remembrance (*Lange*). The language (comp. Luke i. 72, vii. 16), especially in the LXX., can hardly fail to draw the mind onward to that used in connection with the coming of Christ (*Wordsworth*). **In giving them bread.** Ps. cvii. 35—37; Luke i. 68. From the turn of the language it may properly be inferred that the famine was not the result of war, but of drought (*Lange*). **And they went on the way.** And *they* already went, etc. (*Lange*). From this verse it appears plain that all started out for the land of Judah (*Bertheau*)? Until now Naomi had looked on her daughters-in-law as only bearing her company for a while (*Dr. Cassel, in Lange*). The journey to the borders of their own land would probably be an act of oriental courtesy, whether they intended to proceed further or not (*Speaker's Com.*). The sense here demands that this should be read with the following verse: *i.e.*, "On their way Naomi said," etc.

VERSE 6.

Theme.—THE AWAKENING IN MOAB.

"Ah, graceless heart! would that it could regain
From the dim storehouse of sensations past
The impress full of tender awe, that night
Which fell on us! It was as if the Christ
Had been drawn down from heaven to track us home."
Jean Ingelow.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law.

No rest, no comfort, no profit in Moab. Perhaps Naomi had said, "I shall die in my nest" (Job xxix. 18). Not so, the nest is broken up. Now she was ready to say, "I would rather have been a beggar in Canaan, with my husband and my sons about me, than be the possessor of everything in Moab without them" (*Tyng*). Note. *How vain and empty the world will seem to us when the day of a similar awakening comes!* (Luke xv. 16, 17.) Enjoyment gone, wealth vanished, hope departed, loved ones taken away, Moab begins to shew itself in its real character. Like the prodigal, Naomi "came to herself," and remembers now that there is bread enough and to spare in the Father's house.

We have here—

I. The result of a mind's transition. "She arose," a decided, and, in this case, a decisive step. The expression similar to that used in Luke xv. In all probability there would be several preliminary stages: first, the longing for home, then the resolve, then the act. Note. (*a*) *Right purposes are good so far as they go; to be profitable they must be followed by prompt and decisive action.* This is especially true in the critical moments of humanlife. Note. (*b*) *It is time to leave the place of our abode when the godly are taken away, and none left but the wicked to converse with* (*Bernard*).

The awakening, no doubt, was painful; but mark, it is the beginning of a new

life. Naomi's experience a very common one,—through sorrow to repentance, through bitterness to decision. Note. (*c*) *Adversity saves multitudes whom prosperity would possibly have destroyed.* The world becomes distasteful, the pleasures of Moab delight us no longer, rather they weary us. Then comes the old longing for home. Many a prodigal, many a backslider, has been brought to himself again in this way. Note. (*d*) *Such awakenings are the work of the Holy Spirit, though brought about by natural causes.* Possibly she had heard the Divine voice saying, "Arise ye, depart," etc. (Micah ii. 10, Isa. lii. 11) in a still more unmistakable manner. A simple word aroused Jacob, and sent him back to Bethel (Gen. xxxv. 1). The best men need such at times. (See next outline.)

We have here—

II. The influence of a right and wise decision, not only upon her own course of action, but upon "her daughters-in-law." If Elimelech's going to Moab had been the fatal thing in connection with his sons, Naomi's return is to be a blessing to one of the wives at least. This influence argues much in favour of Naomi's piety (cf. ver. 16) and her sweetness and beauty of character. Note. *The truly virtuous are of an attractive power* (*Bernard*). Goodness, even among infidels, will make itself friends. Orpah and Ruth ready to forsake their kindred, their country, and even their own mother, for a stranger whose affinity died with her sons (*Bishop Hall*).

We have here—

III. The reason of this immediate and decisive step. She had heard that the Lord had visited, etc. Note (*a*) *that God's mercy is here as elsewhere the key-note of man's return.* The pious Hebrew saw God in all things (*Cox*). Second causes had not as yet hidden the Almighty. A lesson for to-day; (1) in temporal affairs.

> "Happy the man who sees a God employed
> In all the good and ill that chequers life."—*Cowper.*

(2) in spiritual matters. In the larger sphere of human history, the fact that God has visited His people (Luke i. 68) is the great reason for man's return unto Him. More than this, (*b*) *We never shall return unto Him until we have seen the hand of God in human affairs.* Naomi's faith quickened her footsteps homeward, a faith which came by hearing: "*She had heard.*" *She believed*, and a simple trust in God solved all her difficulties. Hence "*she arose.*" The reasons for her remaining in Moab had ceased, if they ever existed. Now it was dangerous to remain. See the hand of God in all this leading her (Isa. lvii. 18). Recognize it even in the rumour, etc. Trifles in the moment of indecision may be angel-hands, guiding us homeward and Godward. Note (*c*) *Not all that is in Moab can keep the godly there, when God calls them away* (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18).

Bernard on "How that the Lord had visited His people":—

I. That God seeth His people in adversity and want, and cometh in His due time to help them. We are not to think ourselves forgotten in great extremities (Exod. iii. 7, 8), but rest in the stability of His love and promises.

II. That God hath ever had more specially a people for His own, called His people, called the sons of God (Gen. vi.). Not chosen out of any merit in them, but of His mere love (Deut. vii. 8; Eph. i. 4).

III. That corporal food and the necessaries of this life are God's gift. (Deut. xi. 14, 15; Hosea ii. 8, 9; Joel ii. 19). He makes the earth fruitful. Man without Him can do nothing (Ps. cxxvii. 2; Hag. i. 6; Deut. viii. 18).

Fuller on this—

By bread is meant all sustenance necessary for the maintaining of our lives, whereof bread is the chiefest. As the temple of Dagon principally leaned on two pillars, and fell to the ground when Samson took them away, so the buildings of our bodies chiefly rely on bread and water for outward sustenance, which being

taken away, they cannot but presently decay. Let others, therefore, wish those dishes which curiosity hath invented rather to increase than satisfy hunger, which are more delightsome to the eye than pleasing to the palate, yet more pleasing to the palate than wholesome to the stomach: let us pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Bread is a dish in every course: without this can be no feast, with this can be no famine.

"In all the ways of earthly feeling which man can take in order to seek his happiness, he must sooner or later fall into a death-like absence of joy; it becoming clear to him that he has fallen into a grievous delusion."—*Lange.*

"There had been a famine in Judah, but ah! she found a far worse famine in Moab. . . . . Her poverty when she arrived back again seems to argue other troubles besides bereavement. . . . . Far better was this beginning of a return with conscious emptiness to God than her former going out 'full.'"—*Tyng.*

"We know not precisely how the change was effected. . . . . Perhaps the Divine Spirit wrought by the power of memory, thawed the ice away from the frosted spirit by sunny pictures of the past—by the vision of the ancestral home."—*The Prodigal Son, Morley Punshon.*

"Whilst her husband and her sons lived, I hear no motion of retiring home; now these earthly stays are removed, she thinks presently of removing to her country. Neither can we so heartily think of our home above, while we are furnished with these worldly contentments; when God strips us of them, straightway our mind is homeward."—*Bishop Hall.*

"How often is it that in this way the darkest day is the beginning of the brightest life. Reverses, difficulties, trials, are often amongst God's best blessings. From the loss of property is brought out very often the latent energies of character, a power to suffer and to act which, in the querulous being, without a wish ungratified, you would have scarcely said existed at all."—*Robertson.*

"To Naomi there comes the voice, 'Arise, this is not your rest, it is polluted.' Like the prodigal, for the first time she felt in her heart, if she did not give utterance with her lips, 'I will arise and go to Bethlehem, the house of bread, my Father's house.' "—*Dr. Cumming.*

"It has been well and beautifully said that woman has no life but in her family. While her husband and sons lived, their home was hers—there was the scene of her duties, there of her affections; but now those ties were broken, she was called on to act for herself; and with energy and with dignity she did act. Israel was her proper home; and now it was seen, perhaps for the first time, that her heart was there."—*Macartney.*

"All are not taken; there are left behind
Living beloveds, tender looks to bring
And make the daylight still a happy thing
And tender voices to make soft the wind:
But if it were not so—if I could find
No love in all the world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring
Where 'dust to dust' the love from life disjoined,
And if, before those sepulchres unmoving,
I stood alone (as some forsaken lamb
Goes bleating up the moors in weary dearth),
Crying, 'Where are ye, O my loved and loving?'—
I know a voice would sound, 'Daughter, I AM;
Can I suffice for HEAVEN, and not for earth?'"
Mrs. Browning.

"When Naomi, the aged widow, proposed to return to Bethlehem, the two young widows were so charmed with her faith, so struck with her meek submission beneath a load that would have crushed the strongest giant in the land of Moab, so convinced that this aged widow had some spring of consolation that the world had not, some sweet source of peace that they knew not of, that both the young widows, under impulsive attachment to a beautiful character, resolved at all hazards to go with her."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"I suppose when any messenger arrived in Moab out of the land of Canaan, Naomi did presently repair unto him and load him with questions concerning the estate of her country. For nine years Naomi had no news, but of want and scarcity; yet the tenth year there came a man who brought her word that the valleys began to laugh and sing with plenty."—*Fuller.*

"Let none therefore pretend in needless excuses to linger in the land of Egypt when they may return unto the honey-flowing land of Canaan. Joseph must not tarry, with his wife and son, when he is dead that sought the life of the child."—*Fuller.*

VERSE 7.

Theme.—THE HOMEWARD PILGRIMAGE.

"What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind
In the primal sympathy
Which having been ever must be,
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering,
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind."—*Wordsworth.*

Wherefore she went forth out of the place.

The real commencement of the narrative as it concerns the *true* history of Ruth. All else preparatory, explanatory, introductory. A fresh starting-point in the history of Naomi. Poor, solitary, and almost broken-hearted,—yet this is the most promising hour of her life. Her prosperity dates from it, begins to dawn when the night of affliction seems darkest. Divine wisdom has put a boundary to this deep sea of affliction, and said, "Here thy proud waves shall be stayed." Christ suffered Peter to sink, not to perish—Jonah to be overwhelmed, not destroyed—sent Titus lest Paul should be swallowed up of sorrow (2 Cor. vii. 6). Note. *No state so bad, no circumstance so desperate, as to be considered altogether hopeless.* With God's children the smoking furnace of temptation usually precedes the smiling lamp of gospel consolation.—*Macgowan.*

In connection with this return, notice—

I. The thought and purpose. The home ties which bound Naomi to Moab exist no longer. Her husband dead; like Israel, happy only as she realizes that her Maker is her husband (Isa. liv. 5), all things are ready, and now her face is set towards Bethlehem. Returns like these the human response to the Divine appeal, "I am married unto you" (Jer. iii. 14). When they spring up in the heart of the true Israelite, where else can they lead but to the land of the sanctuary and the promises? Necessary then and always that men should renew their spiritual youth—trace back the path until they have assurance that they are standing on holy ground. Jacob responded to a similar appeal, and went back to Bethel, the place of the covenant (Gen. xxx.). Note. (*a*) *Homeward with such often, perhaps always, means Godward.* Life seems to move in a circle sometimes, departing only to come back again; wandering afar to return at length, finding itself at last at the point from whence it started. *Christian experience knows something of this.* With many, as years advance, there is a return to the old landmarks, to the simplicity of old experiences, to the faith and theology learnt around a mother's knee. You may picture many an experience in this way—an oasis of childhood and an oasis of old age, and between them the barren waste, scorched of passion, and laid desolate of sin, which men call *life.* With Naomi, and with all, the past irreparable, but the future availing. Note (*b*) in connection with this return, the Divine intention must have embraced two things—(1) *The renewal of a past consecration;* (2) *The revival of a past spiritual life.*

Notice, II. The significant fact. Men may rise from this lowness and deadness, to this earnestness and newness of life, in a moment and with a word. Samson is caught in the Delilah spell, and bound with the Philistine bonds, but something of the old strength lingers (Judges xvi. 8—15). Note. (*a*) *A plain distinction between the true Israelite and those who know not God*—enough for hope, not enough for presumption. The child carries the home instincts wherever the path may lead; the alien has never known them, though he lives in the Father's house. Naomi an illustration of this. Life without God, a desert to which the sweet rains of heaven bring no fertility. But life with this thought of God in the heart, hidden, slumbering, like the parched and thirsty earth, which may revive again in the time of the latter rain. Naomi's past history in Moab may have been a dead and barren one. In no single point had her condition been improved by the change. Her experience the type of a very common Christian

experience. The freshness of first love—gone. The glow of zeal and the ardour of devotion—a thing of the past. The joy of believing—well-nigh forgotten. Now love has torments, and faith is full of fears, and devotion is a burden. Note. (*b*) *For such there is a return:* (1) *it may be now;* (2) *it may be accepted;* (3) *it may be final and for ever.* We are to think of it as necessary—as not impossible—as not too late.

"In December, the days grow shorter till the twenty-first, the shortest day, when, at a precise moment, the sun pauses and begins to return towards the north. . . . . So there is a precise moment when the soul pauses in its departure from God, and begins to return towards Him. The fruits of that return may not be at once visible; there may be long interior conflicts before the coldness and deadness of the heart is overcome; but at length the good will triumph, and instead of winter and desolation, all the Christian graces will spring up in the summer of divine love."—*Beecher.*

"With fettered steps we left our pleasant land,
Envying our fathers in their peaceful grave.
The strangers' bread with bitter tears we steep;
And when our weary eyes should sink to sleep,
'Neath the murk midnight we steal forth to weep. . . . .
The born in sorrow shall bring forth in joy;
Thy mercy, Lord, shall lead Thy children home,
And Canaan's vines for us their fruits shall bear,
And Hermon's bees their honeyed stores prepare." *Milman.*

"Like Bunyan's pilgrim when he had slept in the bowers of ease, there is to be that humiliating journey, which is not forward, but backward, until the lost treasure has been recovered."—*B.*

"The Bethlehem of the past may become the Bethlehem of the future, once again 'a house of bread' to God's chosen people, if they will only turn their faces thitherward. It may seem a pilgrimage of penitence and sorrow—the path slopes backward and downward—but new consecration is new life, and this is the repentance which needs not to be repented of."—*B.*

"As in music there are particular key-notes, so also in the whole wide life of the world and of man. Life has a deep key-note which answers to the note of life in its bloom. It is called return—return to God—return home—and it is accompanied with a longing after home."—*Lange.*

"She arose to return, not to another idolatrous land, but 'home.'"—*Tyng.*

"Memory is busy, and upon her painted fancy she pictures the home-scenes of the happy past. . . . . Anxiety is busy, and she projects her wonder into the nearing future, and speculates upon the probabilities of her reception."—*Punshon.*

"There is not a trouble so deep and swift-running that we may not cross safely over, if we have courage to steer, and strength to pull."—*Beecher.*

VERSES 8—10.

Critical and Exegetical Notes.—*Ver.* 8, 10. **And Naomi said** [Then said Naomi] **unto.** The first recorded utterance of Naomi. Cox imagines them having reached the ford of the Arnon [N. boundary of Moab], or perhaps the fords of the Jordan [E. boundary of Judah]. **Go, return each.** Shews that they were not natural sisters (*Bernard*). **To her mother's house.** The mention of the *mother's* house, which the separation of the women's house or tent from that of the men facilitates, is natural . . . . has more tenderness . . . . does not imply the death of their fathers (*Speaker's Com.*). Ruth's father was still alive (ii. 11) (cf. Lev. xxii. 13). **The Lord deal kindly with you.** Lit. Jehovah do kindness with you. In עִמָּכֶם the suffix is masc., although referring to women, a colloquial inaccuracy found in conversations (*Lange*). **With the dead.** The Papists expound it, that these women did fast and pray for the souls of their deceased husbands (*Fuller*). The sense is in all probability, "You have been kind to your husbands, who now are dead, whilst they were living." Fuller thinks, however, that more may be implied. **The Lord** [Jehovah] **grant you.** The pronouns in these verses are surprisingly corrupt in the Hebrew (*Kennicott*). Originally colloquial inaccuracies (*Gesen.*) [See Intro. par. 2.] So with the verbs. When courage, virility, fortitude, efficiency, or the like, is intended to be predicated of females, these verbs are put in the masculine gender (*Prof. Lee*). All but two of these inaccuracies are actually found in conversations (*Lange*). **Ye may find rest** [a resting-place] **each in the house of her husband.** She wished them happier marriages than they had with her sons, who were so soon taken from them (*Josephus*). In the East of antiquity, the position of an unmarried woman a very unhappy and perilous one (*Cox*). The Hebrews spoke of the husband's house as a woman's "menuchah," or "rest," —her secure and happy asylum from servitude, neglect, license (*Cox, Lange*). On the construction see Gesen. 130. **Then she kissed them.** To take leave of them (*Keil*). So Gen.

xxxi. 28, 55; 2 Sam. xix, 39; Acts xx. 37. Gave them her parting kiss, as the Jews call it (*Gill*). A rejection of every form of homage proceeds from superstition rather than from Scripture usage (*Macgowan*). And they said, "Surely." כי before a direct statement serves to strengthen it, and it is almost equivalent to a positive assurance (*Keil, Wright*). Not true in all cases (*Lange*). Dr. Cassel trans. "for," but first supplies, "We will not turn back." Best taken like ὅτι in the New Testament before words directly quoted (*Lange*). Not so, but to be translated as "certainly" (*Wright*); "nay" (*Geddes, Cox*); in an adversative sense as "but" (*Rosen.*). We will return. To be proselyted (*Targum*).

VERSE 8.

Theme.—THE FIRST TRIAL OF AFFECTION.

"O friendship! of all things the
Most rare, and therefore most rare because most
Excellent; whose comforts in misery
Are always sweet, and whose counsels in
Prosperity are ever fortunate."—*Lilly.*

And Naomi said, ... Go, return each to her mother's house.

The farewell greetings of friends, the words spoken in parting—everything connected with such moments—will tend to draw out our truer and deeper characteristics, as well as our tenderest and holiest feelings. Having travelled some distance, Naomi's unselfish nature manifests itself (*Braden*). Silence has commended her virtues so far. It would seem she had not urged Orpah and Ruth to go with her even to this distance. We are not to see her, however, in what follows, as careless of their best interest. They are *to go willingly* and knowing what lies before them, *if they are to go wisely.* The Targum puts this in a very striking manner [cf. Crit. Note on ver. 16]. Of course their presence would have been a comfort to Naomi. But note. *A true lover is loath to disadvantage friends for the sake of private interests* (*Bernard*).

We have here—

I. **The care and thoughtfulness of a generous spirit for the outward estate of others.** She knew they had friends in Moab, none in Judah. Even a friendship like hers could scarcely supply the place of a mother's love. *Go, return each to her mother's house.* To go forward with her might be for the saving of their souls. Might there not also be something of selfishness in this? Note. *Our efforts for the good of others need to be watched very narrowly when they coincide with our own interests.* Selfishness the most subtle and insidious of all sins. Judas an instance of one who under a plausible pretext cloaked the most mercenary motives (John xii. 6). If Naomi errs at all, she errs on that side which demands a sacrifice of her convenience and feelings. Her sense of justice and love towards these young warm-hearted women will not allow her to reap any advantage at their cost (*Braden*). She would not have them come to Bethlehem merely on her account. Notice. (*a*) *Self-love contrary to Christ's commands;* against the true fellowship of Christians one with another; contrary to the end of our calling (1 Cor. x. 24; 2 Cor. xii. 14; Eph. iv. 28). (*b*) *A sin as between man and man.* Contrary to that care which God commands for the preservation of other men's estates (Deut. xxii. 2—4; Exod. xxiii. 4, 5). (*c*) *A sin as between man and God.* Self-love is idolatry. Note. True religion will shew its influence in every part of our conduct; like the sap of a living tree, which penetrates the most distant boughs.

II. **A fair test and trial of the fervour and sincerity of those who have already been influenced towards good things.** The deepest religious interests were involved. A choice like this not to be made lightly and from mere personal motives as towards ourselves. Our social influence may be consecrated, but questions like these are to be decided on a higher ground.

Naomi would try (*a*) the strength of their affection to herself. Rather she would see (*b*) whether nature wrought more powerfully than grace (*Bernard*).

So Christ tried those who followed Him (Luke ix. 57, 58). The young ruler (Mark x. 17—22). Note. *With those who have been led towards holy things by the force of a noble and consecrated life, a similar time of testing is sure to come.* The Saviour puts it in one strong and expressive phrase (Luke xiv. 26). The hour arrives when every secondary consideration, every subordinate motive, is counted as nothing in the balances. The momentous question stands on its own merits, and asks of us a deliberate choice. Notice that the same issues were involved here as upon Carmel (1 Kings xviii. 21).

"It is no sign of friendship to draw others into any calamity for our comfort's sake, however much they may press it. Bear the burden bravely alone, if it be possible, and do not crush another heart, though it plead with generous sympathy to share the load."—*Braden.*

"Naomi could not be so insensible of her own good as not to know how much comfort she might reap to the solitariness both of her voyage and her widowhood by the society of these two younger widows, whose affection she had so well tried; even every partnership is a mitigation of evils; yet so earnestly doth she dissuade them from accompanying her, as that she could not have said more, if she had thought their presence irksome and burdensome. Good dispositions love not to pleasure themselves with the disadvantage of others; and had rather be miserable alone, than to draw in partners to their sorrow; for the sight of another's calamity doth rather double their own; and if themselves were free, would affect them with compassion. As contrarily, ill minds care not how many companions they have in misery, nor how few consorts in good; if themselves miscarry, they would be content all the world were enwrapped with them in the same distress."—*Bishop Hall.*

"A sound-hearted friend will follow the apostle's advice, not seeking his own, but his friend's welfare. True love will not make worse, where it cannot make better."—*Bernard.*

"Many give counsel like lawyers for their fees, but few like Naomi for their conscience. She loves their company well, but counsels their safety better."—*Topsell.*

"It is harder for me than for you that we must part. But the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. I have no hope for the future. I must walk my darkened path alone. But you, you may still find an asylum with the people of your own race. Go then and return each to her mother's house."—*Cox.*

"Maternal love knows best how to comfort a daughter in affliction."—*Keil.*

"Here we see widows, if poor, are to be maintained by their parents. These widows (1 Tim. v. 16) were not to be burdensome to the Church, but to be relieved by their own kindred."—*Fuller.*

"If religion does not make us lovely and amiable in our family relations, it does nothing for us, but deceives us to our ruin."—*Simeon.*

"Ittai the Gittite, when following David in his flight from Absalom, was urged to leave him, as Elisha also was repeatedly by Elijah, previous to his assumption to heaven. There was no positive duty lying upon them, or, at all events, none which David and Elijah were not at liberty to dispense with."—*Simeon.*

VERSES 8, 9.

Theme.—A Benediction and a Valediction.

"Wouldst thou from sorrow find a sweet relief?
Or is thy heart oppressed with woes untold?
Balm wouldst thou gather for corroding grief?
Pour blessings round thee like a shower of gold."—*Charles Wilcox.*

The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt, etc.
The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, etc.

A scene now begins of unequalled tenderness and amiableness (*Lange*). The inspired words, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. xxxi. 26) truly verified in Naomi. The speech seasoned with salt (Col. iv. 6), her words breathe all the fervour of piety and the warmth of a self-denying love. We find in them (*a*) a generous recognition of the worth of these two young women, and (*b*) an affectionate regard for their future welfare. This generous, unselfish spirit, one of the secrets of Naomi's influence. Note. *If we had more like Naomi in the Church, we might expect to win more like Ruth*

from the world. See how takingly love behaves itself in every condition, on every occasion, to every person, and about everything (*Pennington*). It sees God in all things, and all things in God.

The text contains, **I. A prayer.** Like David, her eyes are unto the Lord (Ps. xxv. 15). She could not part without praying with and for them (*Macgowan*). Poor and destitute, she had no other means of requiting their kindness (*Fuller*). No other was necessary. A prayer like this better than all gifts. Goes up in a shower of tears, but descends in a shower of blessings—returns laden with comfort, like the southern winds in Egypt, whose wings are charged with the sweet odours of spices (*Penn*).

Notice. Naomi prayed with equal earnestness for both. Did not know which the Lord had chosen (*Macgowan*).

She asks for them (*a*) The favour of God; His kindness, smile, benediction—all the Hebrews would include under their beautiful phrase, "The light of His countenance (Numb. vi. 26; Ps. iv. 6, xl. 3, lxxxix. 15); (*b*) The comforts and blessings which with God's approval would flow from a second marriage. Only in the house of a husband could a woman be sure of respect and protection (*Cox*). (See Crit. and Ex. Notes.) The prayer agrees with the apostle's direction (1 Tim. v. 14), which applies to young widows like Orpah and Ruth. (*c*) And these in the measure they had meted to the dead (cf. Matt. vii. 2; Col. iii. 23, 24) and to her.

Notice. (1) *Duties honourably fulfilled in the past come in to bring a blessing upon us in the present.* Who would not wish for a similar commendation to this of the text? especially with regard to our treatment of the dead. They had given good measure, pressed down, running over; now it is returned to them. When mothers-in-law will thus freely testify of their sons' wives, it is evident that duty has been nobly fulfilled; for they usually set up a high standard (*Braden*). An instinctive conviction in every heart that God will reward us according to our treatment of others (Judges i. 6; Rom. ii. 15; cf. also Exod. xxi. 23—25; 1 Sam. xv. 33; James ii. 13).

(2) *That dutiful conduct has few sweeter rewards in this world than its acknowledgment.* Even aliens to the hope of Israel have experienced this. Ruth does not appear to have exceeded Orpah in affection for those who were gone. The commendation shared equally by both. Shews, on the other hand, that moral and social virtues, and the faultless discharge of the duties of this life, offer no suitable ground for the hope of salvation. How many wives, as tender and sympathetic as Orpah, have gone back again, and been unfaithful to the little light which has shone upon them from God! Yet, even with these, no act of kindness, no self-sacrifice, no silent deed of love, is unknown to Him.

(3) *That prayer for us gains warmth and power by what men see in us.* Every wish is a prayer with God (*Mrs. Browning*). The warmest wishes will in the main follow the most worthy. Live well! and the prayers of the good will gain in faith and confidence. So Paul evidently regarded Timothy (2 Tim. i. 3—6).

The text contains, **II. A valediction.** Her motherly benediction was the best valediction (*Trapp*). She blesses them not in the name of Chemosh, but in the name of Jehovah (*Lawson*). Gold and silver she had not for them, but that which was better, heartiest orisons and well-wishes (*Trapp*). A heart impelled by love and self-devotion does much to invest the scene with its sacred charm. No priest like Melchisedec, yet Naomi blesses them as the patriarch blessed Abraham—as Simeon blessed the infant Christ and His mother (Luke ii. 34), with like faith, and a like trust in God (*ib.* 28)—as Elizabeth blessed Mary (*ib.* i. 42—45).

Note. *Love amid its own sorrows will still think of the welfare of others.* Has a word of comfort and kind wishes in what is intended to be the hour of separation. We get a glimpse here (1) *Into a family life that may serve as a model for all* (*Lange*). What a picture of peace and happiness does it suggest! The women have not only heard the religion of Jehovah confessed in Moab, but they have

seen the expression of it in the life (*Lange*). Never more so than now. (2) *Into the way in which the godly used and made memorable the separations which come in life* (cf. Gen. xxviii. 1—3, xxxi. 55, xliii. 14). So Paul commended the elders of Ephesus to God (Acts xx. 32). So Jonathan separated from David (1 Sam. xx. 42). Men do it now, but not with that reverence and earnest desire meet and befitting in such a case (*Bernard*).

Bernard on this—

I. That it is a duty to pray for those who do either us or ours good (ii. 12; 1 Sam. xxv. 33, and xxiv. 19).

II. That, at parting, friends are to pray one for another (Gen. xxviii. 1—3, xxxi. 55, xliii. 14; Acts xx. 36).

III. That the godly are persuaded that the Lord is a merciful rewarder of the duties of love which one doth toward another (Col. iii. 24).

IV. That children should so well deserve of parents, yea, though [illegible] parents-in-law, as that they may be moved heartily to pray for them.

V. That God will not only barely reward, but so deal with us as we deal with others.

As ye have dealt with the dead and with me.

I. That daughters of a bad race may prove good wives and good children-in-law sometimes.

II. That good and truely loving wives love their husbands' parents for their husbands' sake.

The Lord grant you that ye may find rest.

I. That godly and wise friends pray not only in general, but in particular, as they know them to stand in need, for whom they pray.

II. That godly mothers-in-law are hearty well-wishers to their children-in-law.

III. That second marriages are lawful.

IV. That husbands are to be their wives' rest.

V. That it is God's blessing to be peaceably married

Fuller remarks on *kindly . . . . as ye have dealt with the dead*:—

A godly man dying, leaves behind him,

First, his *body;* to which we must be kind by burial and lamentation.

Secondly, his *estate;* to which we must be kind by careful and faithful administration.

Thirdly, his *children, friends, or kindred;* to whom we must be kind by love and affection.

Fourthly, his *faults and failings;* to which we must be kind by silence and suppression.

Fifthly, his *memory and virtues;* to which we must be kind by congratulation, commemoration, and imitation.

"Prayer eases the soul in times of distress, when it is oppressed with griefs and fears, by giving them vent, and that in so advantageous a way, emptying them into the bosom of God. The very vent, were it but into the air, gives ease; or speak your grief rather to a statue than smother it; much more ease does it give to pour it forth into the lap of a confidential and sypathising friend, even though unable to help us; yet still more of one who can help; and of all friends, our God is, beyond all comparison, the surest, and most affectionate, and most powerful."—*Leighton.*

"The words of parting friends, who are likely never to meet again, make an impression not to be erased. They are like the words of the dying; for our friends are dead to us when we see them no more."—*Lawson.*

"Our duties which we discharge to parents or husbands are as pledges before the Lord to do good unto us. . . . . Goodness procureth goodness, and evil begetteth evil, like as birds breed birds, and fishes fishes."—*Topsell.*

"When the tribe of Reuben, Gad, and half Manasses erected the altar Ed at the passage over Jordan, it startled all the rest of the tribes, as if under it they had hatched some superstitious design; whereas indeed the altar was not intended for sacrifice, but was merely an altar of memorial, to evidence to posterity that these two tribes

and a half, though divided from the rest, were conjoined with them in the worship of the same God. In like manner, when some ministers thank God for the departure of His servants, some people are so weak, and some so wilful, to condemn such for passages of Popery, as if superstitious prayers were made for their departure; whereas, indeed, such congratulation, on the contrary, speaks our confidence on their present bliss and happiness, and continueth the Church militant with the Church triumphant, as the completing one entire Catholic Church of Jesus Christ."—*Fuller.*

"It is the best remembrance of our dead progenitors to follow their virtues. St. Paul cannot look upon Timothy, but presently calls to mind his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, though the latter, no doubt, was long since departed."—*Fuller.*

"Men and women were joined in marriage (Gen. ii.) to the end to be a mutual help one to the other; but many prove such helpers as the king of Assyria did to Ahaz (2 Chron. xxvii. 20), of whom it is said, 'He distressed him, but helped him not.'"—*Fuller.*

"A man's best fortune or his worst is his wife."—*English Proverb.*

"It is an honour to the deceased sons, Mahlon and Chilion, that they made such a selection of wives; but they must also have been worthy of the enduring love they awakened, notwithstanding that there were no children to strengthen the bonds of affection. The attachment of the Moabitish women, Ruth and Orpah, to their new family must be grounded on psychological facts, with a knowledge of which exegesis cannot dispense. The Moabitish women had entered into an Israelitish house, and had breathed the beneficent atmosphere of a family of Judah. Marriage and family life form the real mirror of religious belief and worship. Hence the apostle, in his sublime manner, arranges the relations of husband and wife by referring to the love of Christ for His Church (Eph. v. 22). Ancient Israel therefore distinguished itself from the inhabitants of Canaan, not merely by the name of its God, but by its life at home in the family, by faithfulness and love to wife and child. Purity and morality in marriage were the necessary results of faith in the only living God."—*Lange.*

"The unhappy relations between daughter and mother-in-law, elsewhere usual, must in general have been unknown in Israel. Otherwise the prophet could not represent it as a sign of the extremest social ruin that as the son against the father and the daughter against the mother, so (Micah vii. 6) the daughter-in-law rises up against the mother-in-law."—*Lange.*

"The mother-in-law has forgotten that she was ever a daughter-in-law. The best mother-in-law is one who is dead."—*German Proverbs.*

"Here we learn, God, in the rewarding of the good deeds of His servants, dealeth with them accordingly as they have done with others. Yet far be it from us to suppose that in our stained and imperfect works there is any meritorious virtue, which deserveth that God should proportion a reward unto them; but this freely proceedeth from God's favour, who, to encourage us in well-doing, will not suffer a cup of cold water to pass without its reward. Do we desire, then, to leave dutiful children and faithful servants hereafter? Let us be dutiful to our parents, faithful to our masters. On the other side, hath God afflicted us with Zibahs to our servants, and with Absaloms to our sons? Let us reflect our eyes on that which is past, and call ourselves to account, whether we formerly have not been unfaithful to our masters, undutiful to our parents: no doubt we may then take up the confession of Adonibezek: 'As I have dealt with others, so the Lord hath done to me.'"—*Fuller.*

"Benign restorer of the soul,
Who ever fliest to bring relief,
When first we feel the rude control
Of Love or Pity, Joy or Grief."—*Rogers, On a Tear.*

Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept.

In every life these sudden outbursts of feeling. The clouds do not gather and the showers fall more naturally than sorrow expresses itself in tears. Christ Himself has shewn us that even a perfect humanity is not outside the realm of this law (John xi.). Note. (*a*) *Apathy is not fortitude.* The Christian is no Stoic. Firmness with him is to exist side by side with the tenderest susceptibilities (Eccles. iii. 4, vii. 2; Rom. xii. 15).

Times even when a loud and demonstrative sorrow like this is appropriate; *They lifted up their voice and wept.* So the Ephesian elders said farewell to Paul (Acts xx. 37, 38), "sorrowing most of all that they should see his face no more." So with these three widows. Their love was a passion of the heart, breaking forth into wailing and weeping (*Bernard*). Note. (*b*) *Community of trials unites human hearts, as fire unites metals* (*Dr. Waugh*).

They wept—

I. At the recollection of the many endearing and joyful circumstances of the

past. Their tears a tribute to the love which bound them so closely together to the memories they shared in common, and to "the dead," with whom they had dealt so faithfully. The very joy which had been theirs comes in now to enhance their sorrow. Naomi's reference to the past (ver. 8) probably the key to this affecting scene.

II. At the realization of their poverty and defenceless condition. So far, however, love was strengthened rather than abated by their trials. Affliction had evidently drawn them closer together. Note. *There is a charitable and holy weeping for the miseries of others (Bernard), and of our own.*

III. At the very thought of a separation as possible. Adieu!—more tears have been shed at that word than at the utterance of any other. Separation!—a mysterious, if a familiar subject. Its shadow seems to have fallen upon the spirit of Christ Himself as He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. With these young women, Naomi's kiss meant their dismissal, and they wept at the thought of parting with one who had so endeared herself to them. Note. *One of the sorest afflictions incident to this life is the everlasting separation of those who are mutually dear to each other (Lawson).*

IV. In protestation of their fidelity. Possibly the bitterest trial of all with both was that Naomi should doubt their willingness to go with her, and thus put it to the test. The event (ver. 14) proved that Naomi was right. So Peter viewed the words of Christ (Mark xiv. 27—31), and protested "the more vehemently." Note. *Tears are not always a proof of an enduring fidelity.* Orpah and Peter both sincere, but mistaken. So present sorrow for sin is not to be taken always as a sign of ultimate repentance. Many who have wept with Christ, it may be, as well as many who have done wonderful works in His name, will be found at last saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us" (Matt. vii. 22; Luke xiii. 25).

Bernard on this—

Then she kissed them. This action we may find fourfold: *carnal*, as in fleshly lust; *hypocritical*, as it was with Job and Judas; *holy*, of which the apostle speaks (1 Cor. xvi. 20); or *civil*, as here used at the meeting of friends (Gen. xxix. 11, xxxiii. 4), at their departing (Gen. xxxi. 55). It was honestly used to testify love and unity; therefore in the primitive Church, before they received the sacrament, they thus saluted one another.

And they lifted up their voice and wept.

Weeping is used in Scripture—I. To express sorrow at the parting of friends (2 Kings xiii. 14; 1 Sam. xx. 41); II. For very joy (Gen. xlv. 14, xlvi. 29, xxix. 11); III. In pity and compassion at the misery of others (Job xxx. 25; Jer. iv. 19; Luke xix. 41); IV. At the apprehension of kindness (1 Sam. xxiv. 16).

"Observe the beautiful simplicity of Scripture, which counts it not a thing unmanly to own that Abraham, the stern, iron-hearted saint, has wept. Joseph 'lifted up his voice and wept,' Jacob, Peter, Christ, are all said to have wept. Contrast this with the conventional feeling which represents grief as unworthy manhood."—*Robertson.*

"Tears! what are tears? The babe weeps in its cot;
The mother singing; at her marriage-bell
The bride weeps, and before the oracle
Of high-faned hills the poet has forgot
Such moisture on his cheeks. Thank God for grace,
Ye who weep only! If as some have done,
Ye grope tear-blinded in a desert place,
And touch but tombs,—look up! those tears will run
Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun."
Mrs. Browning.

"Who never wept"—What right have you to say that of angels? None! I own to none in revelation, none in reason, none in anything, except a spontaneous and universal idea."—*Elihu Burritt.*

"Through the dim windows of affliction how changed is the aspect of the world! how cold, and grey, and desolate, all its radiant glory departed, all its beauteous hues reduced to one dull leaden sadness! The tears of sorrow are like spiritual lenses, shewing us the world in its true character, as a poor, empty, unsatisfying thing."—*Anon.*

"It is better for a Christian to be sorrowful, than secure as the people of the world are."—*Luther.*

"Adversity is the only furnace of friendship. If love will not abide both fire and anvil, it is but counterfeit: so in our love to God we do but crack and vaunt in vain, if we cannot be willing to suffer for Him."—*Bishop Hall.*

"The observation here may be the same which the Jews collected (John xi.), which, when they saw our Saviour weep for Lazarus, they said, 'Behold how He loved him!' So these tears in this place were the expression of their affection. Sorrow, like the river of Jordan in the first month, did overflow the banks, and streamed water down their cheeks."—*Fuller.*

"She dismissed them with great affection: *she kissed them*, wished she had somewhat better to give them, but silver and gold she had none. However, this parting kiss shall be the seal of such a true friendship as (though she never see them more) she will while she lives retain the pleasing remembrance of. If relations must part, let them thus part in love, that they may (if they never meet again in this world) meet in the world of everlasting love."—*Matthew Henry.*

"What precious drops are those
Which silently each other's track pursue,
Bright as young diamonds in their infant dew?"
Dryden.

"The rose is sweetest washed with morning dew,
And love is loveliest when embalmed in tears."
Scott.

VERSE 10.

Theme.—THE PROMISING COMMENCEMENT.

"Call to thy God for grace to keep
Thy vows, and if thou break them weep—
Weep for thy broken vows, and vow again,
Vows made with tears cannot be still in vain."—*Herbert.*

And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee.

Youth is the season of warm and generous emotions. Renewed proofs of Naomi's affection only bind these young women to her with stronger ties (*Braden*). Such a love a chain not easily broken (*Braden*). Note. (*a*) *In all this we are to see the reward of a godly affection and a consistent walk.* Piety, wherever found, has the power to win the hearts of people (*Starke*). She won love because she was Naomi, "pleasant" (*Lange*). She cherished no vanity, sought no strife, and did not wish to rule; hence she had peace and love (*Lange*). (*b*) *We should so live that others by our good example may be drawn to love the truth* (Gen. xxxiv. 31; Luke viii. 16). Naomi's character sheds a lustre upon a whole nation. For thy sake we are drawn in love with the whole people (*Topsell*). Besides, to follow and go with Naomi, meant to serve the Lord. So Ruth understood it afterwards (ver. 16), and we can scarcely imagine Orpah intending to serve Chemosh now she resolves to go forward with Naomi. (*c*) *Many infidels and carnal persons are sooner drawn to the Lord by the works which they see than by the words which they hear* (*Topsell*).

We have—

I. An apparent agreement. They walk together—journey on the same road, are engaged in the same object, apparently with the same results. Now they protest in the same language. Worthy of attention, that their first utterance recorded by the inspired writer is a vow of fidelity to Naomi. Their choice voluntary, made with seeming deliberation, and after being urged very earnestly and affectionately in a contrary direction.

See in this—

(1) *An encouraging and happy commencement.* Naomi can rejoice for the present, in not knowing the difference between them, and the Divine record gives no sign as yet. God only knows the Orpah from the Ruth at this stage, outwardly there is nothing to distinguish them. Note. *It is ours to rejoice in the beginnings of good things, irrespective of after results.* Not for us to turn any back (*Tyng*). We should encourage and not suspect, rejoice rather than criticize. The Christian is the sower of the good seed, not the separater between the tares and the wheat. God's command to-day, Let both grow together until the harvest (Matt. xiii. 30).

(2) *A purpose good and commendable so far as it was carried out. We will*

return, etc. So they both said, and said as they thought (*Trapp*). No reason to doubt the sincerity of either (*Lawson*). For awhile they travelled happily and affectionately together, and there seemed no prospect of their separation. So in the heavenward journey with the believer and the mere professor. Whatever can be done in religious appearance in the world, and without an absolute separation of the heart from the world, they may have in common (*Tyng*). Journey together to the very extremities of Moab. Note. *We mistake life, and read it amiss, when we look for those fine distinctions between the righteous and the wicked which shall one day be made apparent.*

We have here—

II. A startling contrast. Undeveloped, unseen as yet, but real and already apparent in the eyes of God. Orpah upon second thoughts did otherwise (*Trapp*). The impulse with her good, but frail. She lacked the deep earnestness of Ruth. The seed sprang up, but it withered "immediately" (Matt. xiii. 5, 6). Her choice the result of passion, and an earthly affection, not rooted in longings after God and the true Israel, as with her sister-in-law (ver. 16). She loved Naomi, but even with all this her affections were back in Moab. And so even now the thorns were springing up which were to choke the good seeds of a noble resolution, made and partially carried out.

So in spiritual things it is not every blossom which comes to fruit. *They fall away* (Luke viii. 13) speedily, miserably, inexplicably, irrevocably. Note. *A conversion in the understanding, sentiment, or imagination may be a flower, but will be fruitless* (*Oosterzee*). The promise is not the performance; beginning well is not always a sign of ending well. There is a great difference between the same mind at different times. Saul in a passion promised fair (1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17, xxvi. 21), but David knew there was no trusting to either his tears or his talk (*Trapp*). Note. *Strong passions, without a settled judgment, commonly produce weak resolutions* (*Matthew Henry*).

Lessons (1) How short-lived are the noblest purposes when made in our own strength! Like the morning cloud and the early dew (Hos. vi. 3). Orpah and Ephraim, types of those only too common in our churches. (2) We ought not to mistake every determination to walk with God's people as a sign of true grace. Regeneration is a change of heart, not a mere momentary change of habit. (See also on ver. 14.)

Macgowan on this—

I. Promises of speech and purposes of heart, whether to God, to His Church, or to individuals, ought to go hand in hand. If a man's word does not express his meaning and bind him, nothing can.

II. Promises and purposes often proceed from passion instead of principle. Exemplified in young converts who have a passionate regard to the person or manner of a preacher. Saul, overcome with David's kindness, promised that he would not seek his hurt.

III. Promises and purposes proceeding merely from passion soon fall to the ground. "I go, sir," one said in the Gospels, and "went not." Some persons melting under the ministry of the word as a summer brook (Job vi. 15—20). *A changed heart necessary to perseverance.* Saul may have religious fits, and Jehu much zeal; for want of a regenerated nature both come to nothing.

Bernard on this—

I. *Surely we will return.* **An earnest affection suffereth not easily a separation from the party affected.** True love liveth in the party beloved, and can no more forsake him than it can forsake itself.

II. *With thee.* **It is better to have the company of one sound Christian, than to enjoy the fellowship of a world of worldlings.** Jonathan took more delight in one David than in the society of all his father's house. The godly are such as go the way to eternal life. Whosoever looks for them must keep them company thither.

III. *Unto Thy people.* **There is a right in every particular member to the Church, as in the Church to every member, and all to Christ, and Christ to them** (1 Cor. xii. 12).

IV. On the whole verse. **In passionate affection more will be spoken than acted.** Both women say the same thing; but yet upon more deliberation one of them calleth back her word. *Passion causes men to speak unadvisedly.* **They are not themselves.**

"What a pleasing sight to see relations walking hand in hand in the fear of the Lord from Moab to Canaan—from this world, doomed to destruction, to the upper regions, the seat of rest and felicity!—*Macgowan.*

"The wise and foolish virgins both take their lamps and go forth to meet the bridegroom. Thus all go together on the way to return unto the land of Judah. As far as this journey lies still within the limits of Moab, so far they may unite to go."—*Tyng.*

"At Preston, at Malines, at many such places, the lines go gently asunder: so fine is the angle, that at first the paths are almost parallel."—*Dr. J. Hamilton.*

"Many listen together to the preaching of the word of God. Many feel together the burden of personal affliction and distress. Many are made to see their danger, and to remember their responsibility to God. Many appear to feel the guilt of their past sinful life, and to be really aroused in their mind and conscience to the necessity of obtaining salvation. Anxious, excited, apparently earnest and sincere, they set out upon their journey back to the gracious Being whom they have so long neglected. Yes, they really set out, and appear to set out sincerely."—*Tyng.*

"How many of these young travellers have I seen! The Church delights over them, the pastor rejoiced in them; Christian friends were encouraged by them; the brightest and most blessed hopes clustered around them. . . . . For a season they must be allowed to go on together. Awakened, convinced, interested in religion, apparently equally determined, they set out well."—*Tyng.*

"So from the heights of will
Life's parting stream descends,
And, as a moment turns its slender rill,
Each widening torrent bends.
From the same cradle side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the peaceful sea."—*Holmes.*

"What a strange and perplexing medley this world is! and how the confusion would be increased, could we read the hearts of men aright, and distinguish the destinies shaping themselves to-day for that other and never-ending life! Here is one who by the grace of God is seeking a crown of unfading glory, yonder one who shall assuredly wear the crown of everlasting reproach; here a spirit climbing heavenwards, there one going down deliberately to the home of eternal darkness. And they dwell to-day side by side, linked by the various ties of social and family life, in the same street, in the same house, it may be, bound together in the closest bonds of love and friendship. To men the difference is but a slight one; with God the distinction is seen as the beginning of a never-ending separation."—*B.*

"Man oft resolves and re-resolves, yet dies the same. Hell is paved with good intentions."—*Luther.*

"Man is but man, unconstant still, and various;
There's no to-morrow in him like to-day.
Perhaps the atoms rolling in his brain
Make him think honestly this present hour;
The next a swarm of base, ungrateful thoughts
May mount aloft." *Dryden.*

"A variety of minerals exhibit translucency only on their edges. The central mass is dark; but, holding the specimen up to the light, light is transmitted dimly through the thin edges. Marble, flint, or hornstone are examples. These symbolize the man who has been brought so much under the influence of Christianity that it has modified his external conduct, produced some regard for true piety, led to some outward reformations, and caused him to adopt some of the forms of religion. Yet the darkness of unregeneracy reigns within. Friends, and possibly the man himself, mistake the rays that struggle through the edges of his character for genuine Christian experience."—*Hitchcock.*

VERSES 11—13.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Are there yet sons? etc. In allusion to the** custom of a man raising posterity to his deceased brother by taking his widow (*Adam Clarke, Jarci, Wright, Keil*). **Probably** this custom obtained among other nations (*Patrick, Scott*). Known among the Gentiles before it was given to Israel (*Gill, Speaker's Com.*) (cf. Gen. xxxviii. 8, 26; Deut. xxv. 5). That law respects a brother by the father's side, and not by the mother's only (*Aben Ezra, Carpzov*). Not binding on a brother as yet unborn (*Gill, Carpzov, etc.*). Evidently, however, extended beyond the brother in the strict sense, and applied to the nearest relative, Boaz (*Speaker's Com.*) Deut. xxv. 5, probably to be understood in this wider sense. **Turn again** [return] **go** [to your own people] (*Targum*).

If I should say. Rather, suppose that I should say I have hope that I were even to be married this very night, and were even to bear children (*Bishop Horsley*). In English we might imitate the sentence thus: For (let us suppose) I say I have hope; I have a husband; I have children; will you, etc. (*Lange*). Another reference to a Levirate marriage, possibly. So Keil, Wright, etc. Not so Rosenmuller, Carpzov. (See on ver. 11.) **If I should have an husband,** etc. If I were with an husband, etc. **And should also bear sons.** Shall I yet have any more sons that I may give them to you? (Syriac.) Perhaps you think that I will marry, and that sons will be born to me (*Arabic*).

Ver. 13. **Would ye tarry.** For לָהֵן read the masculine לוֹהּ (*Houbigant, Bishop Horsley*). Rather to be taken adverbially, as "therefore." "Would you therefore wait," etc. (*Maurer, Rosen., Gesen., Bertheau, Wright*). The rendering of the English version (after Sept., Vulg.), "for them" is very improbable (*Lange*). Omit "for them," and translate "under these circumstances," or briefly "then" (*Lange*). Would ye tarry on these accounts, for these reasons? (*Wordsworth.*) **Would you stay** [for them (omit)] **from having?** etc. Would you therefore shut yourself up, so as not to have an husband? (*Wright.*) עָגַן From the Chaldean, "to keep back," "to shut up" (*Wright*). Does not occur elsewhere in Hebrew. As virgins before their marriage lived in seclusion, so widows who were betrothed to children, while waiting for their coming of age, should keep themselves at home, lest any suspicion should attach to them (*Le Clerc*). And will you be hindered from being married? (*Syriac.*) Will you be kept back by them from marrying? (LXX.) **It grieveth me much.** It is much more (*Lange*), far more bitter to me than to you (*Wright, etc.*). For it has gone much more bitterly with me than with you (*Keil*). As in the Authorized Version (*Gesen., Bertheau*). It may be a trial to you to leave me, but it is a still greater trial to me to be deprived of you; but it must be done, since, etc. (*Tremellius, Junius*). The LXX. has υπερ υμας, not υπερ υμων; and so Syriac, Arabic (comp. Gen. xix. 9). You may have husbands and children, but I can never expect to have either (*Wordsworth*). **The hand of the Lord.** Generally signifies the means whereby He accomplishes His counsels (*Topsell*).

VERSES 11—13.

Theme.—THE SECOND TRIAL OF AFFECTION.

"I have lived long enough: my way of life
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf:
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have."—*Shakespeare.*

"Our voluntary service He requires,
Not our necessitated; such with Him
Finds no acceptance, nor can find; for how
Can hearts not free be tried whether they serve
Willing or no?"—*Milton.*

Ver. 11.—*And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters,* **etc.**

Ver. 12.—*Turn again . . . go; for I am too old,* **etc.**

Ver. 13.—*Would ye tarry for them* [Heb. therefore,] **etc.?**

Here we see in Naomi the same non-proselytising spirit which characterizes her descendants down to the present day (*Anon.*). Scarcely so. Rather the spirit which would convince before it converts, which loves too well to persuaded unwisely, which knows that a conversion made outwardly and in seeming only is but the beginning of a future apostacy.

Note. (*a*) To decide any important question on wrong issues or false expectations is inevitably to find the ground hollow under our feet by-and-by.

(*b*) Love which deals faithfully with us in such moments is likely to prove faithful to us hereafter. It may wound, but it does so with good reasons (Prov xxvii. 6).

(*c*) Love can say "no" sometimes, even when no means "separation."

With Naomi, *in fairness to them*, she says "return,"—but *in her affection* she calls them "daughters." She can do the latter, but she can do nothing more. They could enter into her house, but not into Israel's national life (*Lange*). This the key to what follows. In her own mind, if they go forward with her, the prospect, humanly speaking, is hopeless.

Notice. *Grief often says many really unnecessary things in order to conceal others which it dares not say* (*Lange*). When she says that there is no hope for them in herself [*i.e.*, in husbands being born them through her], she implies there will be none elsewhere in Israel. At best they could only be as widows shut up (see Crit. Notes), waiting for a husband never to be born. A dreary prospect even to Naomi. *The climax of grief shows itself in the climax of impossibilities adduced* (*Lange*).

We have—

I. A test of true love. If they go forward, (1) *They must die to their own interests.* Do not indulge romantic hopes—visionary expectation which can only end in disappointment (*Lawson*). What her sons had done in Moab was not customary in Israel (*Lange*). She loves them too much to deceive them,—would rather part with them than do this, or even allow them to deceive themselves; if they go with her, they must go forward with a similar and kindred spirit of self-denial. Note. Thoughts ripened into resolves by serious consideration are likely to be kept (*M. Henry*).

So Christ dealt with His disciples. He said, "Foxes have holes," etc. (cf. Luke ix. 23, 24, 58). So a faithful pastor will deal with young converts.

The test here plain, sincerely meant, and founded, as the issue shews, upon good reasons. Naomi's words follow, and are in agreement with the outward circumstances. We see, too, that they follow the leadings of Divine Providence. To do the one is often, and if we could rightly read the outward circumstances would always be, to do the other.

Note. (*a*) *God sometimes hedges up the path so that there is nothing before us but the strait gate of self-denial.* Especially is this true of the spiritual life. Stript of all, we enter the kingdom of God. The gate strait, the way narrow.

> "Heaven's gates are not so highly arched
> As princes' palaces. They that enter there
> Must enter on their knees."

(*b*) *To be joined to the hope of the true Israel of God, we must be ready to deny ourselves of everything else.* Esau sold his hope for a mess of pottage. So Orpah.

Again, (2) If these young women are to go forward with Naomi, *love itself must bring its own and only reward.* Not a single inducement is held out, not a single promise made. Naomi would be theirs, nothing more. It is this that sends Orpah back, but suffers Ruth to go onward. And why? Orpah saw herself, while Ruth saw only the beloved one (*Lange*). She went with Naomi, though alone, because she loved Naomi alone.

How true all this is of a real affection for Christ! In love as in life He will be the first and the last. (Comp. Matt. vi. 24, with xxiii. 10; John xxi. 15, 22.)

We love not Christ at all, unless we love Him above all (*Augustine*). Compare the Saviour's description of the stony-ground hearer (Matt. xiii. 20, 21), as seen in the conduct of the Jews (John vii. 60—66), with the words of Simon Peter on that occasion (*ib.* 67—69).

We have—

II. A test of character and motives. Free will is essential to virtue; and that free will may be fairly exercised, there must be no concealment. It must be able to sit down and count the cost. *One test is not sufficient.* Naomi's words search Orpah through and through, from many sides and in many ways. Did she desire "rest in the house of a husband"? (ver. 9.) Hitherto this may have seemed possible to her in going forward. Not so now, and she must see it! *A dreary blank hopelessness in this direction, the secret of Orpah's return to Moab.*

Of this return notice—

(1) Persuasions which fall in with our own desires are readily accepted.

(2) And that until these come we have not been truly and really tested.

(3) The strongest and purest motives are the only enduring ones.

So in Christian life. Time, and circumstances, and the unfolding of events around us, must and will come in to test the momentary decision for Christ.

Note. *This is God's ordinary and deliberate plan in dealing with men in life.*

If heaven could be won by a single struggle, by a single determination, the work would be easy. But experience does for us what Naomi did for these. The test possibly not very severe at first,—the victory on our side (cf. ver. 8—10). Sooner or later we are met by a prospect as blank on the human side as this (Luke ix. 23; Mark x. 21). What then of our better resolutions and vows?

We have here—

III. A test involving the deepest and most solemn issues. (1) *Decisive between God and Chemosh.* So Orpah understood it, for she went back "to her gods." So Ruth understood it (ver. 16).

Note. (*a*) *The human love is made the pivot on which a higher affection turns and hangs*—the human selfishness or unselfishness decisive of more lasting questions. A principle connected with this, love for the creature leading to and shewing a capacity for, love to the Creator (cf. 1 John iv. 20). More particularly must this be seen in a lasting and unselfish affection for the godly.

Note. (*b*) *We may love the image of Christ in His servants, though we have not yet understood the full meaning of our affection.* This Ruth's position. Her affections leaned in that direction, and she was ready to embrace all it involved (ver. 16, 17). Another extreme of character shrinks from all contact with Christ's disciples. A third type exists, in those who love God's people but merely on the human side. This Orpah's danger. Note. *Earthly affections are frail at best, and often mingled unconsciously with much that is selfish.* Such characters fail ignominiously in moments like these.

(2) *Decisive seemingly for time and eternity.* A choice of mere outward circumstances may involve issues which are to last throughout eternity. Opah took Moab and all that Moab implied and included; Ruth, Israel. This last test seems at first a trifling one; judge it by its results! So always in spiritual things. When we choose the lower path, what is it but that we turn our back upon a higher? *The momentary action decisive, the tendency fatal.* Christ would give to the world the kingdom of heaven, but they will have the kingdom of earth, and here they part (*Luther*).

Bernard on this—

I. That in giving counsel to or fro, it is good so to speak as may declare love and respect to the parties.

II. That it was a custom among the Jews, for parents and children to speak most commonly one to another in the nearest and dearest terms of love.

III. That it is a point of wisdom to ask ourselves, Why we will do this or that thing, before we undertake it, or resolve upon it.

IV. That the true, honest-hearted, and such as fear God, in the kind offers of their friends, deal truly with them, and will not lead them into vain hopes.

V. That worldly respects are not the motives which should induce any to join themselves with God's people.

VI. That the wise will not make promises rashly for others, nor persuade to more than they well know.

On the point of marriage, as taught here—

I. That while a woman hath hope of children she may marry.

II. The marriage is for them that are grown up for it and are marriageable.

III. That it is not good for such as intend to marry to defer off too long.

IV. That a godly and wise mother-in-law cannot only be willing, but also will persuade her children-in-law should marry again.

"Till this advice was given, the soundness and sincerity of Ruth's religion did not appear; nor did the rottenness of Orpah's profession discover itself."—*Macgowan.*

"Naomi would not willingly leave her widowed daughters-in-law in Moab. Though she apparently discourages them, it is with the manifest design that they should go with

her upon motives that should be permanent and not disappointing."—*Tyng.*

"She discharges her difficult task with infinite delicacy. They, of course, had no thought of marrying any sons that might be born to the widowed Naomi. Such a thought could not possibly have entered into their minds. Why then does Naomi lay such emphasis on the utter unlikelihood of her having sons, and of their waiting for them even if she should have them? Simply to convey to them that, if they went with her, *they would have no hope but in herself.*"—*Cox.*

"The surprising delicacy with which this is done is such as to shew clearly how truly a religious love educates and refines. The ultimate cause of the grief occasioned by the separation lies after all solely in the fact that Ruth and Orpah are Moabitesses. Naomi could not bear to tell them that if they, as daughters of Moab, went with her to Israel, they would find themselves in a less hospitable situation than they had hitherto enjoyed. She is too tender to remind these good children of the fact that Israel does not sanction connections with Moab."—*Lange.*

"Orpah and Ruth are themselves aware of all that Naomi says to them in these verses. In wishing to go with her, they cannot possibly have a thought of building hopes on sons as yet to be born to Naomi by another marriage. But—and this is what Naomi would make them feel—any other hope than this vain one, they as Moabitish women could not have in Israel. If I myself—she gives them to understand—could yet have sons, I would take you with me. My home would then be your home too. To me you are dear daughters-in-law, whether in Israel or in Moab, *but other prospects have you none.* She heaps up improbabilities in order to indicate in this veiled manner that this was nevertheless the only possible ground of hope for them in Israel."—*Lange* (condensed).

"We see these young travellers meet with many discouragements to their return. How earnestly Naomi argues with them to search what manner of spirit they were of! How kindly she presses them to go back and find their shelter and their rest among the friends they were leaving! How she presses upon their remembrance that she has nothing to offer them, no hopes, no promises to hold out of present or prospective worldly gain! How she mingles the expressions of her gratitude and her grief in order the more effectually to impress them with a conviction of the earthly poverty of her journey! Again and again she kissed them in token of farewell. Again and again they wept in protestation of their fidelity and determination. How affecting and how promising seems such an interview! Read again these pathetic verses. Did Naomi really wish to discourage them? Did she really desire them to go back? Was she willing to leave them in Moab? Did Orpah gratify her more than Ruth? Far from this. She would try their faith and affection. She would know what was in their heart. She would see how long and how truly she might trust them hereafter. And therefore she lays before them the sorrows of the journey and the barrenness of the earthly prospect."—*Tyng.*

"We cannot [but] notice here what seems an interesting fact—the thorough tolerance of Naomi. She indicates not the slightest shadow of intolerant dictation or overbearing advice, the most obnoxious form that advice can take. She recognizes in the two, when then say they will return with her, their indefeasible right, though her own children by marriage, at least to think and to decide for themselves. She felt her business was to give them clear and trustworthy information, but not to exercise even maternal influence in precipitating what they might blame her for when they came to taste the possible bitterness of her position, and to experience poverty, it might be, with the knowledge of the true and living God. She sets to us a most righteous example. Never try to coerce the judgment, or to force the conscience, even of the nearest and dearest; a victory gained at such expense is worse than a defeat. Respect the intellect, revere the conscience; say what you would like, urge what you would prefer, but leave to each individual connected with you perfect liberty to decide and act for themselves. To tempt, to coerce, or compel by fear, or by reward, or by force, is to intrude your hand into the holy place which the human conscience is, even in its aberration,—to lay a rude hand, as it were, upon the ark of God, and to assume prerogatives for yourself which God alone is exclusively competent to exercise.

"As there was to be no coercion or violence on the part of Naomi, there was on the other hand to be no concealment. There are two ways of bringing another over to what we like; we may either coerce the person, which is most criminal, or we may conceal—which is most dishonest—the actual state of things, and draw over to us unawares one who will afterwards, on discovering facts as they are, repent and regret the step. Naomi was candid. She shews them that there was no earthly prospect whatever of bettering their condition."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"I cannot think very highly of Naomi's character when I see the advice she gave to her daughters. She loved them, it is true; but her love was of too carnal a nature; for she had more respect to their temporal welfare than to the welfare of their souls. Should not the advice of Moses to Hobab have been hers to both of them, "Come with me, and God will do you good"? (Numb. x. 29—32.) Naomi, thou hast given us a picture too often realized in the present day: in her we see a mother more anxious about the providing of husbands for her daughters than the saving of their souls."—*Simeon.*

"A Jesuit might raise the question, *is it wise* to tell the whole truth under circumstances like these? The Christian conscience is satisfied in knowing that *it cannot be sinful.*"—*R.*

Theme.—RESIGNATION IN SUFFERING.

"Oh, 'tis good
To wait submissive at Thy holy throne,
To leave petitions at Thy feet, and bear
Thy frowns and silence with a patient soul."—WATTS.

Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me . . . . that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.

Three widows remaining, the solemn and affecting monuments that God will not be forgotten. Here is the end of all the wanderings of the past! Naomi's sorrow, bitter as it is, intensified by the helplessness of those who have shared her calamities with her, her afflictions finding an increasing heaviness because of her unselfish desires for their welfare. [Some translate, "It is far more bitter to me than to you," or, "It has gone much more bitterly with me than with you."] God has reduced me to such mean services that I can do nothing for you (*Gill*). Note. (*a*) *To a gracious spirit it is an increase of sorrow to see others involved in the fruit of our sins.* The heaviest burden of many a parent's heart explained in this (cf. 2 Sam. xii. 15—23). Even a monarch's crown brings no exemption from the law (2 Sam. xxiv. 17). (*b*) *True love takes to heart a friend's afflictions in its own troubles* (*Bernard*). Human life, alas! shews too often the other extreme, a hardness and callousness of heart to all the expressions of Divine displeasure as they concern ourselves, and a total insensibility to the result of our sin, as it may affect others. (*c*) *Calamities like these not only bring sorrow for the dead, but grief for the living.*

Notice, **I. The source of this affliction.** Men generally see in details like these (v. 1—5) the natural and ordinary sequence of events. Naomi saw something else beyond and behind, infinitely more worthy of note. Her loss proceeded from no other by-causes, but from the hand of God (*Fuller*). As the showers come from the clouds, so her afflictions from the Lord (*Topsell*). Why doubt this, though they had stolen upon her a thousand times more naturally, gently, and insensibly, were that possible? Stoics ascribe calamities to inevitable fate; Epicureans and atheists, to blind fate; Philistines, to chance; Christians, to that One by whom the very hairs of our head are all numbered (*Macgowan*). Note. *This is one of the distinguishing marks of God's children in all ages.* Afflictions come of the Divine hand. Their measure, their continuance, their purpose, all appointed of Him "with whom we have to do."

A caution necessary here. God's people may sometimes without good reason think that the hand of the Lord is gone forth against them (*Lawson*). Job thought so when the hand of Satan had despoiled him of his substance and his children (Job i. 12, 21; ii. 6, 10). So also there is a slothful way of giving assent to Divine judgments. We say it is His hand when it is the hand of our own sloth and folly. Eli, with a resignation which would have been beautiful under other circumstances, said, "It is the hand of the Lord" (1 Sam. iii. 18). Note. *This a common phrase in the mouth of the wicked.* Under this covert we often hide our impatience as well as our sinful carelessness.

II. The spirit in which afflictions should be borne. (*a*) *With resignation.* Naomi does not complain. Seems to bow to the inevitable future. Doubtless found comfort in the fact that *it was the hand of the Lord*—that God, with whom is mercy, and not another, had wounded her heart. Note. *Every other way of receiving chastisement folly and madness* (Acts ix. 5; Isa. i. 5; Rom. ii. 4, 5). (*b*) *With candour.* She acknowledged evidently the sinful cause of all the discipline through which she has passed as in herself—"*the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.*" Otherwise the passage reads like an accusation against God. Note. *Some have even represented life in this way as a conflict with God* (cf. Job ix. 34, xiii. 21, xvi. 12—21, etc.). A terrible thought, if true, and there is a sense in which it is true of the wicked. Naomi, however, looked upon her afflictions as a

judgment for lingering in the country of Moab (*M. Henry*). (*c*) *With wise thoughtfulness.* She obeys and returns (*M. Henry*). (*d*) *With unselfish care and regret for the evil estate of others.* Grief too often hardens the heart to all other sorrow outside our own. It is not so here. Naomi's gentle unselfish spirit shines out conspicuous among the Old Testament saints. *It grieveth me much for your sakes.*

Topsell on this:—

First, that all our afflictions come from the Lord, that He might chastise His own, and confound the ungodly (Job xxxiv. and xxxvi.). Neither the godly escape, nor the wicked go scot-free (Deut. xxxi. 18). This the confession of Moses and of David, a man more exercised in trouble than all the world beside (Ps. cxix. 71).

Secondly, that the godly are so patient in all their tribulations, even from this consideration, that the Lord's hand afflicteth them (2 Sam. xvi. 10—12; Job ii. 10).

Bernard on this:—

I. The most godly sometimes take their afflictions very heavily (Job iii.; Jer. xx. 9—12).

II. Afflictions are the more grievous for friends wrapped therein, so as one cannot help another.

III. That all afflictions come by the power and providence of God—as by a hand upon us (Lam. i. 12—17; Amos iii. 6, iv. 6—11; 2 Chron. xv. 6).

IV. That the godly in common calamities take themselves to be especially chastised. This good woman applied the whole cross to herself. They think upon their own sins, and not upon other men's misdeeds.

"And if there be some things which we believe to be inflicted by the Lord, to whom can we render our patience better than to the Lord? Nay, He teacheth us to rejoice moreover, and to be glad in that we are thought worthy of Divine chastisement. *As many as I love*, saith He, *I chastise.* Oh, blessed is that servant on whose amendment the Lord is bent; with whom He deigneth to be angry; whom He deceiveth not by hiding His admonitions from him!"—*Tertullian.*

"Patience . . . adorneth the woman, approveth the man; is loved in the boy, praised in the young man, respected in the old; is beautiful in every sex, in every age. Come now, let us describe her form and her demeanour. She hath a countenance serene and placid; a forehead smooth, contracted with no wrinkle of grief or of anger, her brows evenly and cheerfully relaxed, her eyes cast down in humility, not in melancholy. Her mouth beareth the seal of honourable silence. Her colour is such as those have who are free from care and crime."—*Tertullian.*

"God Almighty in mercy makes this world unpleasing to good men by affliction, that they may set the less value upon it. This is the voice of the rod, and of Him that hath appointed it, which every wise man ought to hear and answer with all obedience, submission, and thankfulness; and when affliction hath wrought this effect, its business is in a good measure ended, and for the most part it is thereupon eased or removed."—*Hale.*

"'Oh,' saith the people, 'God hath justly sent this plague for the corruption of the magistrates.' 'It is justly inflicted,' saith the magistrate, 'for the disobedience of the people.' 'Herein,' saith the poor man, 'God hath met with the oppression and extortion of the rich.' 'Herein,' saith the rich man, 'God hath paid home the muttering and the repining of the poor.' 'Now,' saith the prodigal, 'God punisheth the covetousness of old men.' 'Now,' saith the old man, 'He scourgeth the prodigality of such as be young.' Far otherwise Naomi, who, though the arrows of God did glance and rebound, to the wounding of Orpah and Ruth, yet she thought herself was the mark at which God did level His shafts. 'The hand of the Lord is gone out against me.'"—*Fuller.*

"We are never nearer to God than when we are lowest in our own estimation; and never more pleasing to Him than when we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes."—*Charles.*

"To be dejected is natural; but to be overcome by dejection is madness, and folly, and unmanly weakness. You may grieve and weep, but give not way to despondency, nor indulge in complaints. Weep as wept your master over Lazarus, observing the just limits of sorrow which it is not proper to pass.—*Chrysostom.*

"He who possesses religion finds a providence not more truly in the history of the world than in his own family history; the rainbow which hangs a glistening circle in the heights of heaven is also formed by the same sun in the dewdrop of a lowly flower."—*Jean Paul Richter.*

"Disappointments meet us at every turn; where we expected we should be particularly favoured with helps and advantages . . . . we behold ourselves left destitute; so that we have no more a place of refuge upon earth, no more a dear counsellor or friend who is as our own soul. By this means we are compelled, as Noah's dove was, by the wide watery waste which did not afford a

single resting-place, to fly to the Ark, and to take shelter there."—*Venn.*

"Be still in sorrow! As God wills!
Let that thy motto be;
Submissive 'neath His strokes receive
His image stamped on thee.
Be still in God! Who rests on Him,
Enduring peace shall know,
And with a spirit glad and free,
Through night and grief shall go."
Sturm.

"And if in our unworthiness
Thy sacrificial wine we press;
If from Thy ordeal's heated bars,
Our feet are seamed with crimson scars,
Thy will be done!
Strike, Thou the Master, we Thy keys,
The anthem of the destinies,
The minor of Thy loftier strain,
Our hearts shall breathe the old refrain,
Thy will be done!"
Whittier.

"The good we have enjoyed from Heaven's free will;
And shall we murmur to endure the ill?"
Dryden.

VERSE 14.

Critical and Exegetical Notes.—**And they lifted up their voice and wept again** "exceedingly" (*Dr. Cassel*), "still more" (*Luther*). As in E.V. (*Lange*). (See on ver. 9.) Much affected with the tender things Naomi had said (*M. Henry*) (cf. Gen. xxix. 11). **And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law** (*και επεστρεψεν εις τον λαον αυτης*), [and returned to her own people] (LXX.). So Vulgate, Arabic, Syriac. Unquestionably found in their MSS (*Bp. Horsley*). So Dathe, Houbig, Booth. Not so Wright. Lange supplies, "and turned back." As it stands, the sentence seems incomplete. Buxtorf contends, however, that the return is implied in the act of kissing. Naomi's kiss (ver. 9) evidently meant "return," and so Orpah's may be understood to say "farewell." The last sad kiss of a tearful separation (*Steele* and *Terry*).

But Ruth clave unto her, followed her (LXX.), stayed by her (*Luther*). Her person was, as it were, glued unto Naomi, as the force of the Hebrew words is (*Bernard*). In Psalm lxiii., the same word is rendered "followeth hard." No fresh demonstration of affection, but she *clave*, etc., not merely because of a tender affection for her mother-in-law, but also a yearning desire to know more of the God and land of Israel (*Steele* and *Terry*). The conversion of Ruth probably commenced at this time (*A. Clarke*). She had been a proselyte before (*Rambachius, Aben Ezra*). **Ruth** (see Intro., par. 4, 5; and Crit. and Exeg. Notes on ver. 4). In his genealogy of our Lord, St. Matthew inscribes the name of only four women—Thamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba [literally only three are mentioned by name, and these three are foreigners (*Kitto*), Bathsheba being designated as "her of Urias"]; and among these four, Ruth easily holds the pre-eminence (*Cox*). Thamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, were all women of dubious virtue (*Cox*). Ruth is, in some respects, one of the most interesting female characters of the Bible (*Kitto*).

Theme.—**The Crisis and the Contrast once again.**

"'Twixt two worlds, like a star, life shines;
A little star with fading light;
Above, o'erbending day; beneath,
The deep abyss of endless night.
* * * * *
And who shall hymn its praise aright,
If it enfold eternal bliss?
What notes express the funeral dirge,
If it the future crowning miss?"—*B.*

And they lifted up their voice and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her.

Insensibility in certain circumstances is not fortitude; it is savageness and stupidity, or something worse (*Toller*). Their tears here their ornament and their honour. Both wept again (cf. ver. 9); alike in the signs of their affection, not so in the actions which follow. Probably Orpah's grief was the more demonstrative (ver. 10), especially so now. Note. (*a*) *That all outward sorrow giveth not certain witness of the soundness of the heart* (*Bernard*). Saul's weeping to David (1 Sam. xxiv. 16). Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, in his tears a deep dissembler (Jer. xli. 6—8). (*b*) *The difference between mere kindness of manner and self-sacrificing love most vividly depicted here* (*Speaker's Com.*).

"And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law,"—the customary salutation in saying farewell. Previously Naomi had kissed Orpah (ver. 9). They parted possibly without a word. Too much overcome to speak, the natural and usual sign of affection comes in to say that which words cannot.

> "Oh! when the heart is full; when bitter thoughts
> Come crowding thickly up for utterance,
> . . . The poor, common words of courtesy
> Are such a very mockery."—*Willis.*

Note. (*a*) *An evidence here that affection survives a difference of opinion* (*Dr. Cumming*). Separation, even on the most vital points of religion, does not necessarily mean alienation of heart; just as distance, either in time or space, does not necessarily affect true love. The adoption of a false religion must not deaden affection, or break up the courtesies of social intercourse (*Dr. Cumming*). (*b*) *Farewell may be spoken and received, even when we think it spoken unwisely, without anger.* No dispute here, no bitter feeling in the mind of either. (*c*) *Second remonstrances may succeed where previously our entreaties and persuasion have met with apparent failure.* This is true whether for good or for evil.

We have here again (cf. on ver. 10)—

I. A marked and strong contrast. Orpah going back in tears, perhaps in despair (cf. Matt. xix. 22); Ruth going forward in resolute self-sacrifice, though from the human side without hope; the one to the pleasures and delights of the past; the other, true to the little light already given, onward to a better future.

(1) *Points to an underlying though unseen difference in character and faith.* Orpah preferred the sensuous to the spiritual; Ruth, the unseen to all she knew as lying behind her in Moab (cf. ver. 16, 17). Orpah sought rest in the "house of a husband;" Ruth, rest with the Israel of God. Orpah could not easily understand the force of a great moral or intellectual obligation (*Cumming*); Ruth determined to follow love wherever it might lead her. In Orpah we have nature in its most hopeful aspect; in Ruth we begin to see the dawnings of grace. Note. *Where and how a child of sense differs from a child of the Spirit.* (α) In the want of steadfastness. (β) In clinging to self after all in the decisive moments of life. (γ) In love of the world behind when the final hour of choice has come. (Cf. on ver. 10, div. II.)

(2) *Suggests a very common contrast between natural gifts and grace.* The one makes a man, the other a Christian. Orpah's religion was passion; Ruth's, principle. Orpah's illustrates mere profession; Ruth's, decision for God. *Orpah the type* of the beautiful, affectionate, fair, but frail ones of this world. Much that is good, only the touch of the defiler is there. *Ruth the representative* of the noble, enduring, and self-sacrificing spirit God only can bestow.

We have here—

II. A final separation. Brought about by natural causes, but involving spiritual and even eternal issues. (See on ver. 11—13, div. III.; also p. 57.) *Onward with Naomi means Godward,* and so heavenward. Like Abraham, Ruth becomes through her fidelity "heir of the promises," and ancestress of a long line of kings, ending in the Shiloh that was to come. *What does backward mean?* And yet all depends upon the choice of the moment. *A painful but inevitable crisis* (*Tyng*). They have dwelt together, suffered together, journeyed side by side. Yet now they must separate, and here they have come to the decisive point. Their paths lie apart. For the future, their aims, direction, the issues of their lives, wide as the poles asunder.

Note. (*a*) *A time like this in the soul's history.* The sinner comes to a point where he must either go forward and confess, or backward and deny, the hope which is in Christ Jesus. He stands, like Orpah, irresolute, deciding now for and now against. But sooner or later the irrevocable decision comes, and all the future hangs upon *that.*

(*b*) *A time like this in the history of all human friendships.* A separation as certain, and as final; if not before, then in that great day when the sheep are divided from the goats (Matt. xxv. 32). (1) *Often brought about by religious influences* in this world. The Ruths go forward to new and holier companionships; the Orpahs back again to the sinful associations of Moab. (2) *Sometimes by outward circumstances*, the exigencies of human life, and the providential leadings of God.

"There is no union here of hearts
That finds not here an end."

IMPROVEMENT.—Learn (1) the necessity for an instant and wise decision in these critical moments; (2) That the plausible choice, like Orpah's, is not always the wise one; (3) That all connexions, all enjoyments, all worldly pursuits, should give place, as with Ruth, to the sweet and endearing influences which draw us towards God.

Fuller on this (condensed):—

These words contain two general parts; (1) A blazing meteor falling down out of the air; (2) A fixed star fairly shining in the heaven.

That thou mayest finally persevere observe these four rules—

I. Utterly renounce all sufficiency in thyself. Who but a madman will nowadays warrant the paper shields of his own strength, that knows that Adam's complete armour of original integrity was shot through in Paradise?

II. Place all thy confidence on the undeserved mercy of God. Perseverance cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor as yet from the south; but God suffereth one to fall, and holdeth up another. The temple of Solomon had two pillars; one called Jacin ("The Lord will stablish"), the other Boaz ("In Him is strength"). So every Christian—the temple of the Holy Ghost—is principally holden up by these two pillars, God's power and will to support him. Wherefore in every distress let us cry out to God, as the disciples did to our Saviour in the midst of a tempest, "Help, Master, or else we perish!"

III. Use all those means which God hath chalked out for the increase of grace in thee; as prayer, meditation, reverent receiving the sacraments, accompanying with God's children, reading, hearing the word, etc.

IV. Always preserve in thyself an awful fear lest thou shouldest fall away from God. Fear to fall, and assurance to stand, are two sisters; and though Cain said he was not his "brother's keeper," sure I am that this fear doth watch and guard her sister assurance. *Faulus est gradus certitudinis, quantus sollicitudinis:* they that have much of this fear have much certainty; they that have little, little certainty; they that have none, have none at all. It is said in building, that those chimneys which shake most and give way to the wind will stand the longest: the moral in divinity is true; those Christians that shiver for fear by sins to fall away may be observed most courageous to persist in piety.

IMPROVEMENT.—Let us therefore "work out our salvation with fear and trembling:" ever trembling, lest we should be cast to hell; ever triumphing that we shall come to heaven: ever fearful, lest we should fall; ever certain that we shall stand: ever careful, lest we should be damned; ever cheerful that we shall be saved.

"Look at that sad group of three tearful widowed women standing in the highway debating this question, Shall we say farewell or not? Is it not a scene for any painter? No, not for *any* painter, but for one whose soul can sympathise with womanly grief, and whose hand has skill enough to portray that pathetic mingling of sorrow and love. How

he would sketch the varied expressions in those faces! Naomi with eyes full of eager entreaty, and lips quivering with pain; Orpah moved to weeping, yet perplexed, wondering what decision to make, and casting a glance ever and anon back on the road they have come; Ruth standing, grasping her mother's hand with unwavering resolve in every line of her face and attitude. It is a sacred moment, an hour of suspense, on which depends a future that no prophet's eye hath discerned."—*Braden.*

"We have [here] a very striking and instructive instance of the distinction between mere amiableness of natural temper and religious principle. Forming your opinion of them from the whole of the former part of the history, you see nothing to choose between them. Both of them appear to great advantage, most amiable and well-disposed young women; excellent wives, and kind and affectionate daughters-in-law. But when put to the test, you see the difference. Orpah appears to have had every natural excellence that Ruth possessed, but it was not grafted on religious principles. Ruth was not only as amiable as her sister-in-law, but knowledge of the true God appears to have reached her heart. . . . The one was a lovely heathen, the other what we should call in this day an amiable Christian. . . . Orpah was like the young man whom Jesus loved for his amiable qualities, but who went away sorrowful; Ruth was like Mary, who chose the better part, that could not be taken away from her."—*T. N. Toller.*

"It might be said with a certain degree of truth, that the same cause induced Orpah to go, and Ruth to remain—the fact, namely, that Naomi had no longer either son or husband. The one wished to become a wife again, the other to remain a daughter. Few among the natural children of men are as kind and good as Orpah; but a love like that of Ruth has scarcely entered the thoughts of poets. Antigone dies for the love of her brother; but the life which awaits Ruth was more painful than death. Alcestis sacrifices herself for her husband, and Sigune persistently continues in a solitary cell, with the corpse of her lover whom she had driven into battle, until she dies; but Ruth goes to a foreign land, and chooses poverty, not for a husband or a lover, but for the mother of him who long since was torn away from her. She refuses to leave her for the very reason that she is poor, old, and childless. Naomi, having lost her sons, shall not on that account lose her daughters also. Rather than leave her to suffer alone, Ruth will starve with her or beg for her. Here is love for the dead and the living, surpassing that of Alcestis and Sigune. That Ruth does for her mother-in-law, what as the highest filial love the poet invents for Antigone, when he represents her as not leaving her blind father, is in actual life almost unexampled. Nor would it be easy to find an instance of a deeper conflict than that which love had to sustain on this occasion. The foundation of it was laid when Elimelech left his people in order not to share their woes. It was rendered inevitable when, against the law of Israel, his sons took wives of the daughters of Moab. It broke out when the men died. Their love for their Israelitish husbands had made the women strangers in their native land; and the love of Naomi for her Moabitish daughters made her doubly childless in Israel. Nationality, laws, and customs were about to separate mother and daughter-in-law. But *as love had united them, so also love alone has power to solve the conflict*, but only such a love as Ruth's. Orpah escaped the struggle by returning to Moab; Ruth ends it by going with Naomi."—*Lange.*

"Longing for knowledge,
Thirsting for truth,
Loving fair virtue,
Saying like Ruth,
'I will go with thee,
Thine shall be mine;'
Friendships it may chance
Leaving behind;

New worlds shall open,
Bright with a sheen,
Decked with a glory,
Eyes have not seen;
Clearer the sunshine,
Lighter the shade,
Daily and hourly
O'er life's way made.

True to thine own self,
True to thy God,
Treading the pathway
Good men have trod;
All the past for thee
Worketh amain,
All the past in thee
Liveth again;

All that is worthy,
All that is true,
In thy right deed
Liveth anew;
And unborn blessings
Springing from thine,
Gladden the morrow,
Make it divine."—*B.*

"Nature in its highest endowments and improvements is infinitely below grace. There are some believers in Christ whose natural tempers are never refined to such a degree as we might expect from their religious principles; yet they shall dwell for ever in the regions of love. There are other men whose natural tempers are affectionate and humane. Perhaps they are improved by all the advantages of a polite and learned education. Thus they acquire an uncommon degree of respectability in the world, and yet continue destitute of faith in Christ and love to God. With all their attainments they are still in a miserable condition. The love and esteem of men will not secure them from the wrath of that God whose service they neglect, and whose Son, the only Saviour, they despise."—*Lawson.*

"Like Martha and Mary of New Testament history, Orpah and Ruth represent two different types of character. Orpah's home attachments, and desire to find rest in another husband's house, control and limit her life influence and action. Ruth's loftier spirit discerns in the God of Israel the fountain of a purer religion than the Moabitish idolatry affords, and she gladly forsakes father and mother, and sister, and native land, to identify herself in any way with the people of Jehovah."—*Steele and Terry.*

"Some habits and practices of godly men may be easily counterfeited. Yet I think that there are certain virtues of God's children which are perfectly inimitable. To bear 'reproach for Christ,' and to suffer wrong patiently, is to my mind very much like 'the root' in practical godliness. . . . See there a young man who has risked losing his situation because he will not conceal his attachment to Christ. Such as these are sometimes brought into great straits. They do not see any precept that plainly says, 'Thou shalt do this,' or 'Thou shalt do that.' But they find they must do one thing or the other. They make their choice, and it is against their worldly interest, but it is done for the love they bear to a Saviour's name. Little faith takes a strong grip. Oh! I cannot doubt the root of the matter is found in them."—*Spurgeon.*

Theme.—THE FAILURE OF A MERELY EARTHLY AFFECTION.

"Oh heart of ours! so weak and poor,
That nothing there can long endure;
And so their hurts find shameful cure,—
While every sadder, wiser thought,
Each holier aim which sorrow brought,
Fades quite away, and comes to nought."—*Trench.*

"Thy soul shall have her earthy freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life."—*Wordsworth.*

And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law [and went back to her own people, LXX.].

A little entreaty will serve to move nature to be good unto itself (*Bishop Hall*). So with Orpah. No other persuasions have been used but worldly reasons taken from marriage. She that even now, for the love of people and mother-in-law, would go as far as the farthest, for the cogitation of a heathen husband forsaketh both God and people and mother and sister (*Topsell*). Alas for human nature, for here is the type! Men follow the higher and nobler instincts of the heart for awhile; but how often is it that afterwards inducements of worldly prosperity or comfort come in to turn them aside, and to lead them back to the world! And alas, too, for the fickleness of our best resolutions (cf. ver. 10), if unaided by Divine grace!

See here, then—

I. An instance of instability and inconstancy. Orpah a reed shaken with the wind (*Braden*). (1) *She must have been untrue to her convictions.* Men do not go so far as this towards the true Israel, without seeing enough to encourage them in still going forward. We may pity, but pity must not warp the judgment. We may even excuse in some measure. But the true reason of such "returns" found in the apostle's words, "They went out from us," etc. (1 John ii. 19). (2) *She certainly was untrue to her affections.* And untrue to the lower love, how could she be true to the higher hope of Israel? (cf. 1 John iv. 21.) Seeking the things that were her own, she left behind her the things that were Christ's (Phil. ii. 21).

Note with such—(*a*) *A change of mind evidently underlies this outward change of purpose.* Man in himself fickle as the wind, especially in those things which concern his best welfare. "Ye *did* run well," etc. (Gal. v. 7)—a common and necessary exhortation always.

Note. (*b*) *The necessity for a decision is the signal for a retrograde movement* (*M. Timson*). They begin to go backward precisely as they begin to understand what is really involved in going forward. So with those who followed Christ (John vi. 60—66). When they heard that discipleship meant faith in Him (*ib.* 63), and a Divine power working in themselves (*ib.* 65), they stumbled at the saying, and "walked no more with Him." They "went back," as Orpah did. Such

minds will go a certain length in positive duty, and yet always draw back from a really decisive act (*M. Timson*).

Note. (*c*) *In some feeble way there will be an exhibition of actual love for the course which is nevertheless renounced* (*M. Timson*). Orpah wept, and Judas bitterly repented. The vision of things divine haunts them even as they return into the darkness they have chosen (*M. Timson*). And inspiration sends after them the solemn words of warning, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. x. 38). Notice then the perilous position of those who stand in the critical moments of life—on the boundary-line of God's Israel, and yet with love to the Moab behind hidden in the heart. *Orpah the type of a mind half awakened to the things of God* (*M. Timson*).

See here—

II. An illustration of apostacy. Orpah neither cold nor hot, like the Laodicean church (*Macgowan*). Puts her hand to the plough, but looks back again; and such are unworthy the kingdom of heaven. Like Judas with Christ, she is loving enough to kiss, but not to cleave to Naomi.

Notice as significant—*This going back* (1) her own choice, (2) deliberately made, (3) respectfully expressed, (4) freely and finally carried out (1 John iv. 21).

So with many to-day. They forsake the world apparently; join themselves to God's people; travel towards the heavenly Jerusalem; seemingly profit in religion, but they have no stability, "no root in themselves," as the gospel expresses it (Matt. xiii. 21). Easy Christianity, half-hearted Christianity, external Christianity apostatizes, and well it may! Without vital change, men return to the world, to their old state and ways (Heb. iii. 12). They return speedily, and as certainly as Orpah went back to Moab (John vi. 66). And this in the face of all their protestations (ver. 10).

Note. (*a*) *Professions are like bills; you judge their worth by the names they bear, the firms by which they are issued* (*Braden*). (*b*) *What is soon ripe is soon rotten* (*M. Henry*).

See here—

III. An illustration of the causes and consequences of apostacy. (1) *The causes.* With Orpah the reasons for this return to be found (*a*) *in her inclinations.* Hence she is easily persuaded to yield to these. She prefers her pagan connections, after all, to the privileges of the house of Israel. Puts her country, her kindred, and her god [Chemosh] before all else. Eve lost Paradise for an apple, and the Gadarenes will lose Christ rather than their swine (*Bernard*). Such is man's choice naturally. A warp in the nature, a proneness to meaner things. (*b*) *In her supposed interests.* She went as far as consisted with her hope of carnal enjoyment (*Macgowan*). But when the prospect of a husband in Israel was for ever put aside (ver. 12, 13), then she returned to Moab, where there still might be hope (ver. 8, 9). Note. *An inability to deny herself the key to this "going back."* Orpah like many now, who are almost but not altogether Christians. They follow Christ to a great length, but cannot *forsake all* for Him; are willing to part with much, but not with everything; go as far with Him as costs no pain and calls for no complete self-denial, but stumble at a daily "cross-bearing," and that following Him through good and evil report which He demands (cf. Luke xiv. 26; James iv. 4; 1 John ii. 15, etc.). (*c*) *In the threatened inconveniences.* Orpah a type of those who have a sensitive hatred to suffering (*Braden*).

(2) *Its consequences. She "goes back,"* and the separation becomes wider every hour. So an awakened and convinced mind can never abide at the line where a Saviour is refused (*Tyng*). No permanency in that state. *She goes back to her own people.* So apostates return to the old companionships and associations of the past; to the haunts of dissipation and delight (2 Pet. ii. 22); to the folly and frivolity of the past (2 Tim. iv. 10); to covetousness and ever-increasing greed (2 Pet. ii. 15, 16); to unbelief and hardness of heart (2 Tim. ii. 17); to open hostility and hatred of the truth (*ibid.*). *She goes back to her god.* Chemosh

preferred to Jehovah—a being without existence, having eyes and yet seeing not (Isa. xliv.), to the Lord of heaven and earth. Note. *Apostates begin in the spirit, but end in the flesh* (*Lawson*). How true the apostle's words of such, "The latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet. ii. 20).

LESSONS.—(1) We are not easily to entertain men as sincere, because they have made a fair show in religion for a time (*Bernard*). (2) An amiable temper or an affectionate behaviour will not compensate for perseverance in the heavenward calling. Being almost a Christian never conducted any man to heaven (*Macgowan*). (3) Those who at first were forward in religion, may afterwards altogether fall away (*Fuller*). Asa possibly an illustration of this (2 Chron. xiv. 10—12). Note. Many leave Christ with a kiss, who would shrink from betraying Him as Judas did.

Price on this (condensed):—

Theme.—ORPAH, OR THE MERE PROFESSOR.

An onlooker not able to discover the difference between Orpah and Ruth so far. Begins to appear now. The crisis has come. Both had made professions (ver. 10). Here the difference is made apparent.

I. We learn that it is possible to go a long way towards Christianity, and yet not to be a Christian. To be born, educated, and dwell in Christian households, these are great blessings, but do not constitute or make a Christian. It will not do to be almost, we must be altogether, decided for Christ. The cup that is almost sound will not hold water. The ship that is almost whole will not weather the storm. To be almost a son is to be a bastard. To be almost a Christian is to be almost saved, and to be almost saved is to be altogether damned. Nothing will save us short of being in Christ. Feelings, sentiment, profession, are all good *if* they spring from a living faith in Jesus Christ; without this they are worse than worthless.

II. We learn that it is possible to deceive ourselves, and to think that all is right, when in truth all is wrong with our souls. Hardly possible that Orpah played the conscious hypocrite. She meant what she did when she became a proselyte—did not deliberately act a part. Feeling and sentiment [love for her husband] blinded her eyes. Now that which looked like *principle* proves itself *passion*. Discovers that she had deceived herself. Love to God, which she had thought supreme in her heart, subordinate to the love of Moab.

This often so with men; they are *not hypocrites*, they are self-deceivers. Education, circumstances, the force of influences around them, produced an emotional religion which they mistake for vital godliness. They hear with joy like the "stony-ground hearers." We do such an injustice, if when we see them going back we point the finger of scorn, and cry "hypocrite."

III. We learn that our religion will not profit us at all unless it be characterized by perseverance to the end. Orpah stands with Jehu, Judas, Demas, Hymenæus, Alexander, and Philetus—Beacon lights! Their word to us is this, "Beware!" No grace, however bright and precious, will take us to heaven without perseverance. Language cannot adequately set forth the misery of the man who apostatizes. The latter end of that man is worse than the beginning (2 Pet. ii. 20—22). Conscience becomes hardened, etc.

IMPROVEMENT.—Is our profession a mere profession or the fruit of a living faith? Brought by circumstances to the boundary-line between life and death, have we stopped there? The Bible full of such instances. Felix trembled; Balaam prophesied; Herod heard gladly; Judas sat at the sacramental table with our Lord! Whatever we do, we must not stop short of conversion; if we do, we perish. We must not be content with a mere outward reformation; we must seek that radical and entire change in the soul, of which the Holy Spirit is the author.

Bernard on this—

I. It is easy to make signs of love, but not to shew the true fruits of love.

II. Worldly respects are great hindrances in the course of godliness.

III. An unsound heart may for a time make a fair show in the way to Canaan, but yet turn back at the last.

IV. Such as want soundness towards God for religion, may yet have otherwise commendable parts in them.

"In the first half-awakened state of the mind, and before Christ has been seen in the vision of a true faith, to go away, or to cut oneself off from the human teacher and friend, is to cease from the spiritual good already attained. It may be that Orpah did not realize this at the time, or that she was but partially conscious of it; yet it was present, and the mightiest element in the question upon which she was called to decide. She was not the first, nor the last, who, in forsaking a friend, forsook also a true teacher and guide—one whose love would have been the guarantee of the quality of the higher influence exerted."—*M. Timson.*

"Is this she which even now was so promising in her words, and so passionate in her weeping? See how soon a forward professor may turn to a fearful apostate. Though she standeth or falleth to her own Master, yet, as the Psalmist saith, 'I am horribly afraid for those that forsake Thy law' so have we just cause to suspect the fearful final estate of Orpah."—*Fuller.*

"Orpah had left her heart in Moab, with its follies, its frivolities, its amusements, its dissipations, its sights, festivals, and *fêtes;* its idol temples, shrines, and altars. Her heart was so full of these, that she could not detach it from them; and therefore she returned to her gods, her people, and her country."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"The bright morning does not always shine unto the perfect day; the sweetest spring-bud of promise does not always ripen into precious fruit. The seed that was cast on stony ground grew rapidly up, but withered in a moment. Orpah's decision was the decision of impulsive feeling, of filial affection; it was strong suddenly, it grew up in an instant, and in an instant it perished."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"On second thoughts her enthusiasm cooled down. I daresay she said within herself, 'It was not enthusiasm—it was simply fanaticism, and I have now come to a better mind.' One would gather from the conduct of Orpah that she had feelings, not very deep affections, strongly rooted in her nature; pure passions, but not yet consolidated into fixed principles; resolutions that had no anchorage in her heart, no hold of her inmost and her deepest nature. She was vacillating, impulsive, very likely sentimental; her tears and smiles followed each other in rapid transition. She was easily swayed; the victim of feeling and momentary impulse; repenting at her leisure what she had accepted in a hurry."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"If the soul be not changed, though there may for awhile some religious colour appear in the man's face, he will at last return to his former habit."—(*Spiritual Bee*) *Penn?*

"I have sometimes seen a blazing comet much outshining other stars, and attracting the eyes of men to behold with wonder, which yet by its decay and vanishing awhile after hath appeared to have no true place among the stars, but in the lower region."—(*Spiritual Bee*) *Penn?*

"Gifts, affections without Christ . . . . They are the fair flowers and perfumes which only make more terrible the death-pyre."—*Wadsworth.*

"Men said to-day of one who sinned, 'What may
This mean? What sudden madness overtook
His brain, that in a moment he forsook
The rectitude which until yesterday
Had made his life a beacon by the way
To common men?' I answered, 'We but look
On surfaces. Temptation never shook
One soul whose secret hidden forces lay
Firm centred in the right. The glacier bides
For ages white and still, and seems a part
Of the eternal Alps. But at its heart,
Each hour, some atom noiseless jars, and slides,
Until the avalanche falls with thundering weight.
God only knoweth the beginning's date.'"
Helen Hunt.

"They fall deepest into hell who fall backwards into hell."—*Bunyan.*

"Καταφιλειν ουχ εστι φιλειν, saith Philo. Apostates betray Christ with a kiss, temporaries forsake Him, and embrace this present world."—*Trapp.*

"Faith is the champion of grace; but what is it worth if it faint and fail? Love is the nurse of grace; but what will it avail if it decline and wax cold? Humility is the adorner and beautifier of grace; but what will it profit if it continue not unto the end?"—*A Puritan Divine.*

"As the worst travelling is when the road is frozen after a thaw, so those are frequently the most hardened who have had some convictions, who have had some knowledge of the Gospel, and some religious affection, and have then relapsed into their natural hardheartedness."—*Arrowsmith.*

"Every one is rather a Naomi to his own soul, to persuade it to stay still, and enjoy

the delights of Moab, rather than to hazard our entertainment in Bethlehem. Will religion allow me this wild liberty of my actions, this loose mirth, these carnal pleasures?"—*Bishop Hall.*

"His heart he cannot, will not, give to Christ. Anything else he will do. But nothing else will avail him anything. He will be baptized. But baptism cannot save him. He will be confirmed. But that is not salvation. He will come to the table of the Lord. But there is no salvation nor him there. He will fast and pray. He will toil and labour in his own self-righteous plans. He will try to cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, and resolve to work religious works. But all this is not salvation. And here he must separate from the people of God, though they have travelled long together. They must go on, *and he will not.*"—*Tyng.*

"You have seen a ship out on the bay, swinging with the tide, and seeming as if it would follow it; and yet it cannot, for down beneath the water it is anchored. So many a soul sways towards heaven, but cannot ascend thither, because it is anchored to some secret sin."—*Beecher.*

"The soul's birthright is not cast away by a momentary weakness or folly,—one act such as this before us may decide the woful transaction, but a hundred minor actions and thousands of thoughts of wrong have gone before it to make it possible. . . . Temptation, when it comes upon a man well-grounded, leaves him as the wave leaves the rock over which it has rolled; but when principles are already undermined, a trivial temptation, a single wave, is often enough to complete the ruin."—*H. Wonnacott.*

***Theme.*—THE CONSTANCY OF A DIVINELY-KINDLED LOVE.**

"True friends, like ivy and the wall it props,
Both stand together, or together fall."—*Dic. of Poetic Illustrations.*

"Without a murmur I dismiss
My former dreams of earthly bliss;
My joy, my consolation this,
Each hour to cling to Thee."—*Mrs. Elliot.*

But Ruth clave to her.

The Scriptures are seminally brief (*Lynch*). A phrase here expresses a love and heroism which has seldom been equalled and never excelled in human history. "Ruth *clave* to her." The force of the Hebrew word is to be knit as man and wife inseparably (*Bernard*) [cf. Gen. ii. 24; Matt. xix. 5, where the word is used in this connection]. So Onesiphorus clung the more closely and tenderly to Paul, when Phygellus and Hermogenes, with all who were in Asia, turned from him in the hour of his distress (2 Tim. i. 15, 16).

Note. (*a*) *The heart has reasons which the reason does not comprehend* (*Pascal*). Who can explain, much less justify at the time, a sublime and self-sacrificing choice like Ruth's? All outward appearances are against it,—the choice would not be heroic were it otherwise.

(*b*) *But a deathless love such as this has always in the end proved its own vindication.* So when the soul cleaves to Christ, it is influenced by motives which the understanding but imperfectly estimates, and which the carnal mind fails altogether to comprehend. The Saviour Himself offers the true explanation, that "wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt. xi. 19). Yet in this is the real test as to whether we walk by faith or by sight. If you would believe, you must crucify that question, "Why?" (*Luther*).

(*c*) *Every theory which fails to appreciate that man is a spiritual being, influenced in other ways than mere external ones, must inevitably misread and misinterpret human life.* If this life is all, what profit in self-denial, what promptings towards virtue, that can seriously command our attention for a moment? On the sceptical theory, Ruth's choice a mere impulse, and not even her after-success and prosperity can redeem it from the charge of folly. And yet what heart fails to estimate the incomparable superiority of Ruth to Orpah? The heroic in history, that which men have admired and loved in all ages, that which has made human progress possible, and left a halo of glory around the past, is mirrored here. That which is best in human fiction finds its counterpart; that which is noblest in life. its

image and semblance. And all is explained and accounted for if we see in Ruth one chosen out of a far country, and from among a strange people, that she might become an Israelite indeed—one yielding to the Divine impulses, and listening to the Divine voice, though unable as yet to interpret its full meaning. "Forget also thine own people and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord: and worship thou Him" (Ps. xlv. 10—13).

We have here—

I. The choice of true love. Orpah's stone of stumbling and self-denial seen as a jewel flashing with heaven's own light to Ruth. Naomi so precious in her person and influences as to be clung to, be the consequences what they may. The choice a kindred one to that of Moses in its faith and self-sacrifice. (Choosing rather to suffer affliction, etc., Heb. xi. 25.) Can we be far wrong in seeing in both the same underlying religious convictions, as coming in to decide the choice? If so, it is a mistake to say that love for Naomi *merely* led her to become a Jewish proselyte. Note. (*d*) *Love may be spiritual and God-given, and yet perfectly natural in its way of development.*

Notice of this choice, (1) *That it was not that of impulse, but of conviction.* Nothing can shake her resolution. The love that has brought her so far with Naomi kept her steadfast now, and to an affection like hers decision becomes more and more easy. Note. (*a*) *Affections are the great deciding influences in life.* Hence Paul says, "Set your affections," etc. (Col. iii. 2). And (*b*) *The supreme affection is the great central power in human life.* Everything else responds as by a law of gravitation to that. Hence, if it be toward Moab and the world, as with Orpah, everything around us will lead us backward; if it be towards the hope of Israel and God, onward and forward as with Ruth.

(2) *That it was not the influence of mere sentiment or excitement.* The choice made with a full determining to abide by it, come weal or come woe, for ever (*Price*). She had counted the cost. Probably, as a Moabitess, she might have to bear cold looks and harsh treatment (*Price*). Significant that she was called afterwards *Ruth the Moabitess* (cf. ii. 2, 12, etc.), the designation of an alien and one outside the covenant. Note. *Steadfastness essential to the formation and manifestation of a religious character* (*Toller*). Piety must be such as to stand the test of time.

(3) *That it was not biased by any selfish hope.* The same gloomy prospect before her which had deterred Orpah from going forward. But like that one who cried out "so much the more" because of discouragements, Ruth clave to Naomi the more steadfastly, in spite of threatened affliction and seeming opposition. Seems to say, "Be the sacrifice ever so great, I am ready to make it; I shall delight in making it" (*Simeon*). Note. (*a*) *A true and steadfast convert to Israel follows very naturally in one who has stood such a testing of the natural affections.* (*b*) *The portion of Israel and of Christ not a barren choice, though it may look so for the present.* Such are to receive "a hundredfold" (Matt. xix. 29). The promise literally fulfilled in the case of Ruth.

We have here—

II. An instance of more than filial piety. Almost as marvellous in what it leaves as in what it clings to. She realizes, doubtless, a keen sense of her mother-in-law's forlorn condition; but only the more vividly to become conscious of Naomi's worth and her own duty. Her natural affections are to be seen as an open door leading towards faith and God. Note. (*a*) *The next degree unto godliness is the love of goodness* (*Bishop Hall*). He is in a fair way to grace, that can value it (*ibid.*). (*b*) *There are circumstances in which we are called to stand to certain people in the place of God* (*Braden*). Parents have to do so to their children. They have to learn of us before they can learn of Him (*ibid.*).

See here (1) *The expulsive power of a new affection.* Transforms her whole nature, changes the tenor of her whole life. Love is a marvellous magician (*Braden*). Note. (*a*) *It is not what we take up, but what we give up, which makes us*

rich (*Beecher*). Only with renunciation life, properly speaking, can be said to begin (*Carlyle*). Mark, too, (*b*) *The higher good can only be gained by the sacrifice of the lower* (*M. Timson*).

See here then (2) *A sacrifice almost unequalled in its severity.* The old nature against her, the force of habit, and all the early associations of the past. Yet love triumphs over all. Put to the trying alternative, either to forsake her mother-in-law and the hope of Israel, or all that was behind her in Moab, she does not hesitate for a moment. The religious aspect of the question comes in here. This alone could justify her leaving her own mother for a comparative stranger. Remember what Moab was, and in this higher aspect Ruth's choice is completely vindicated.

III. An illustration of the entire surrender of ourselves to God. We have a final separation from Moab, and a complete devotion to Naomi. So David clave to the sanctuary (Ps. xxvii. 4). So Paul to Christ (Phil. iii. 7—9), and to the way of salvation. "This one thing I do," he said (*ibid.* 13).

See what a real determination for God and religion is (cf. 16). It does not consist in rash promises, in hasty resolutions, in transient feelings, however strong, but in what the Scriptures call "a full purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord," *a fixedness of soul upon matured conviction* (*Toller*). To this Barnabas exhorted the Christians at Antioch (Acts xi. 23). Note. (*a*) *To know Christ truly is to need Him eternally.* Whoever has tasted Him can never again live without Him (*Lange*). No going back to the "beggarly elements of the world" *then!* (*b*) *Only those who are cleansed by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost will cleave to Christ and His believing Church in the dark and clouded day of adversity* (*Macgowan*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) Away with all mere affection which kisses, but does not cleave to Christ! Clinging to Him is the only test of true love (John xv.). All else counterfeit,—this the only conclusive sign that we are His. (2) See too the necessity for decision. To make a beginning in the right direction is a great thing (*Beecher*). (3) Learn also the power of resolution; it silences temptation. Those that go in religious ways without a steadfast mind stand like a door half open, which mocks a thief; but resolution shuts and bolts the door (*Miniature Com.*).

"Blessed is Ruth, who so clave to her aged mother-in-law that she would not leave her until death. For this reason, Scripture indeed has justly extolled her; but God has beatified her for ever. But He will judge, and in the resurrection condemn, all those wicked and ungodly daughters-in-law who deal out abuse and wrong to their parents-in-law, unmindful of the fact that they gave life and sustenance to their husbands. . . . If therefore thou lovest thy husband, O wife, then love them also who gave him being, and thus brought up a son for themselves and a husband for thee. Seek not to divide the son from his father or mother, lest thou fall into the condemnation of the Lord, in the day of awful inquest and judgment."—*Origen.*

"Neither self-interest, nor hope, nor vanity mix themselves up with this love. It is a purely moral and spiritual love, of which no other instance is on record. It is in fact the love of those whom God by His mercy has won for Himself, and who love God in their brethren. It is the evangelical love of the apostles, who loved Greeks and Franks, Persians and Sythians, as their own flesh and blood. Such love as this followed the steps of our Lord, and tarried where He was. Confession, martyrdom, prayer, and every brotherly thought or deed, spring from the love of the converted heart."—*Lange.*

"Love is above all, and when it prevails in us all, we shall all be lovely, and in love with God, and one with another."—*Penn.*

"Lead men through love to love. For love cultivates and preserves the true and the good by doctrine, life, prayer, watchfulness, and by a thousand other inventions of its inexhaustible genius."—*Sailer* (*quoted in Lange*).

"If moral virtue could be seen with mortal eyes, it would attract all hearts to it."—*Plato.*

"A spiritual relationship is never so close and so strong as when the persons are related also by *strong natural sympathies.* . . . Now and then it has happened that this harmony has been so strangely complete, that each has loved the other literally as his own soul, and felt indeed as though there were but one soul between them. The fact is, that the one spirit enters into and affects similar natures so similarly, that when either speaks out of his deepest life, he equally speaks the experience of the other. When these similars

by nature are apprehended by the Second Adam, and the sweet life of eternity springs up in their hearts, the relation becomes one of unutterable endearment. . . . Every step of their spiritual progress relates them more and more essentially."—*John Pulsford.*

"'Twixt that, long fled, which gave us light,
And that which soon shall end in night,
There is a point no eye shall see,
But on it hangs eternity.
This is that moment—who can tell
Whether it leads to heaven or hell?
This is that moment—as we choose,
The immortal soul we save or lose.
Time past and time to come are not;
Time present is our only lot;
O God! henceforth our hearts incline
To seek no other love than Thine."
J. Montgomery.

"Think not too meanly of thy low estate;
Thou hast a choice; to choose is to create!
Remember whose the sacred lips that tell,
Angels approve thee when thy choice is well." *O. W. Holmes.*

"A few forsake the throng, with lifted eyes,
Ask wealth of heaven, and gain the real prize—
Truth, wisdom, grace, and peace, like that above,
Sealed with His signet, whom they serve and love." *Anon.*

"Blest with this followship divine,
Take what Thou wilt, I'll ne'er repine;
E'en as the branches to the vine,
My soul would cling to Thee.

Far from her home, fatigued, oppressed,
Here she has found her place of rest;
An exile still, yet not unblessed,
While she can cling to Thee."
Mrs. Elliot.

"A few years ago, and you were not; a few more, and on this stage of life you will be no more. Much has been done, much is yet to be done in the interval. You are now at the outset of womanhood. Woman's duties, woman's strange and mixed destiny of suffering, feeling, and deep life, is beginning."—*Robertson.*

"They say that when the temperature has gone down below the freezing-point, water will remain apparently the same, and yet that it will congeal at a touch and in a moment. So with the changes and transitions in human character and life. They go on silently and invisibly, until some crisis in outward circumstances brings them suddenly to maturity."—*B.*

"Thus it is that in some decisive moment every soul that attains salvation makes its choice, by which it adopts the true Jehovah as its portion. It abandons all the former idolatries of its life, and becomes a true worshipper of the true God."—*Steel and Terry.*

"So a soul that is truly brought to Christ affectionately loves Him and heartily cleaves to Him, resolves in the strength of Divine grace to follow Him whithersoever He goes or directs, and is desirous of having communion with none but Him."—*Gill.*

"Ruth's attachment was worth ten thousand of Orpah's kisses. The young nobleman in the Gospel treated our Lord with high respect; but all this availed him nothing, for he would not sell his possessions at Christ's command, and become a follower of Jesus. Happy were the apostles who continued with Him in all His temptations. They left all, and followed Him. What they left was little; but that love which disposed them to leave all was highly valued by Him, and they received a hundredfold of recompence even in this world."—*Lawson.*

"The story of Ruth has shed a peaceful light over what else would be the accursed race of Moab. We strain our gaze to know something of the long line of the purple hills of Moab, which form the background at once of the history and of the geography of Palestine. It is a satisfaction to feel that there is one tender association which unites them with the familiar history and scenery of Judea—that from their recesses. across the deep gulf which separates the two regions, came the Gentile ancestress of David and the Messiah."—*Stanley.*

"Ruth is a prophecy, than which none could be more beautiful and engaging, of the entrance of the heathen world into the kingdom of God. She comes forth out of Moab, an idolatrous people, full of wantonness and sin, and is herself so tender and pure. In a land where dissolute sensuality formed one of the elements of idol worship, a woman appears as wife and daughter, chaste as the rose of spring, and unsurpassed in these relations by any other character in Holy Writ. Without living in Israel, she is first elevated, then won, by the life of Israel, as displayed in a foreign land. Amid surrounding enmity and jealousy toward Israel, she is capable of being formed and attracted through love."—*Lange.*

"What can you do, but faithfully and simply follow Him who has said, 'Whosoever loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me'? You must go forth with Ruth, and leave those who, rejecting Jesus, will not go with you. You must follow the Lord fully, though you follow Him alone among your earthly connexions."—*Tyng.*

VERSE 15.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**And she [Naomi] said, Behold thy sister-in-law,** *i.e.*, wife of a husband's brother; no English word exactly answering to the original Hebrew. The same word is rendered brother's wife (Deut. xxv. 7. 9), being the feminine of that ren-

dered (*ib.* 7) husband's brother (*Speaker's Com.*). **Unto her gods** [god]. "And to her god" (*Luther's Bible*). The singular is to be preferred (*Lange*). Adam Clarke thinks that both Orpah and Ruth had been idolaters so far. With Ruth, however, a leaning towards the God of Israel and His laws (*Keil*). Wright argues from these words that Naomi viewed idolatry without serious disfavour, at least as practised by others. This held upon insufficient data. Naomi's words do not necessarily contain any recognition of the Moabitish deity, or indicate (as Wright suggests) that she was possibly led astray by the false idea that Jehovah was only the God of Israel (*Lange*). Was Jephthah then (Judges xi. 24, 27) similarly led astray? (*Lange.*)

Return thou. Serious in her intentions, sincere in her advice (*Keil*). Perhaps said merely to prove Ruth's constancy (*Speaker's Com.*). (Cf. Josh. xxiv. 15—19; 2 Kings ii. 2—6). Spoken that it might be made clear whether she would adhere steadfastly to the God of Israel (*Seb. Schmidt*). Not that she desired her to return, but to try her sincerity (*Gill*). She had simply the earthly prosperity of her mother-in-law in her mind (*Keil, Carpzov*).

***Theme.*—THE THIRD AND LAST TRIAL OF AFFECTION.**

"What though the world unfaithful prove,
And earthly friends and joys remove?
With sure and certain hope of love,
Still would I cling to thee."—*Mrs. Elliot.*

***And she* [Naomi] *said, Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back. . . . Return thou*, etc.**

How sad is the history of a return to Moab (*Tyng*), both in its effects and in its influences! With Orpah, to go back to her people was to return to her gods. And yet how pregnant with meaning! Evident now that Orpah had mistaken a mere momentary feeling (cf. ver. 10) for something deeper and more lasting. Evident, too, that Naomi's suspicions and surmises were correct. Note. (*a*) *The "return" justifies the tests* (ver. 8, 9; 11—13). Very naturally, also, it leads to this final trial of Ruth's affection and steadfastness. Naomi anxious still; fears lest even now cleaving to her should be the result of a rash, unthinking choice; dreads a future apostate in a present convert. Could not really intend to persuade her beloved daughter to return to the service of Chemosh (*Lawson*). Said of those of whom the world was not worthy, "they were tempted" (Heb. xi. 37). So here. Note. (*b*) *The trial is by no means intended to justify the "return."* In the present case, disobedience a virtue (*Macgowan*). When Christ said to Judas, "What thou doest do quickly," He by no means authorised Judas to execute his wicked designs (*Lawson*). Orpah doubtless went back to Naomi's grief (*Lawson*).

I. See where the strength of this last trial lay. *An unfavourable example lends its weight to worldly disadvantages* (*M. Timson*). These heavy enough before; now Ruth is to see one she loves turning away from Naomi, and lending her influence to lead her backwards. Orpah has "gone back," too, although she cherished as warm an affection for Naomi as any a mother-in-law could expect. Note. (*a*) *Example has a mighty influence*, especially the example of those who are dear to us. Christ felt it to be so in that moment when the last link between Himself and His half-hearted followers was severed, and He turned to the rest with the question, Will ye *also* go away? (John vii. 67.) A scriptural doctrine, that because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold (Matt. xxiv. 12). Note. (*b*) The castle seems almost won where one-half the soldiers are overcome (*Lawson*). Orpah has yielded, and yet for all this Ruth stands steadfast.

II. See in what lies its meaning and purpose. It evidently settled the questions at issue once and for ever. *Decision comes as the result of conflict.* Distrust of one's own judgment the most terrible spectre to fight (*M. Timson*). Especially so when the example of those we respect is adverse to our decisions. This mastered, however, the rest is easy.

LESSONS. (1) The falls of some may justly bring others into trial (*Bernard*). (2) Not the length or fury of the conflict which is important, but its results. (3) The folly of apostacy must not damp but rather invigorate our zeal.

Fuller on this (condensed) :-

Examples of others set before our eyes are very potent and prevalent arguments to make us follow and imitate them, whether they be good examples—so the forwardness of the Corinthians to relieve the Jews provoked many—or whether they be bad—so the dissembling of Peter at Antioch drew Barnabas and others into the same fault. But those examples, of all others, are most forcible with us which are set by such who are near to us by kindred, or gracious with us in friendship, or great over us in power.

USE [Lesson] I. Let men in eminent places, as magistrates, ministers, fathers, masters, and the like (seeing that others love to dance after their pipe, to sing after their tune, to tread after their track), endeavour to propound themselves patterns of piety and religion to those that be under them.

II. When we see any good example propounded unto us, let us strive with all possible speed to imitate it. . . . Follow not the adultery of David, but follow the chastity of Joseph; follow not the dissembling of Peter, but follow the sincerity of Nathanael; follow not the testiness of Jonah, but follow the meekness of Moses; follow not the apostacy of Orpah, but follow the perseverance of Ruth.

III. When any bad example is presented unto us, let us decline and detest it, though the men be never so many or so dear to us. Imitate Micaiah (1 Kings xxii.). . . . Yea, but one may say, "What if I find in the Scripture an action recorded whose doer is known to have been a godly and gracious man, may I not, without any further doubt or scruple, follow the same?" . . . The Holy Spirit hath not set these sins down with an intent they should be followed; but first to show the frailty of His dearest saints when He leaves them to themselves; as also to comfort us when we fall into grievous sins, when we see that as heinous offences of God's servants stand upon the record in the Scriptures.

"Oh, Orpah, Orpah! that thou hadst been wise, at least in this thy day, to think of the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hidden from thy eyes. . . . And could we know her history, we should doubtless find in it many a sorrowful and weeping hour as she thought of these friends of her youth whom she was to see no more. . . . It is the history we have seen in the child of the world over and over again. You may renounce the Saviour, and walk with Him no more. You may go back to Moab, and bury yourself in its sins and follies. But you will find no peace or happiness there. Your conscience will never again allow you to rest."—*Tyng.*

"Worldliness is not living in the world, possessing the world, using the world; worldliness is pursuing the world which is, to the forgetfulness and exclusion of that which is to come; it is a sacrificing of the future to the present, the enjoying of earth's mess of pottage at the loss of the heavenly birthright."—*H. Wonnacott.*

"Where the heart is indeed influenced by sovereign grace, and drawn by the eternal Father, opposition will only serve to inflame our love and zeal, as oil cast into the fire serves only to increase its ardour instead of extinguishing the flame."—*Macgowan.*

"Still Naomi proves the spirit of Ruth. 'Your sister has gone back to her people and her gods. If you mean ever to go back, now is your best time to go. Think well of what you give up, and of what you may encounter in accompanying me. Much as I would love to have you to go with me, I do not wish you hereafter to feel disappointed or grieved on my account. Remember, I have nothing to offer you. If you go with me, it must be as a partner of my griefs and wants.' Thus God often proves the young disciple with new trials. He sends the east wind upon the young trees of His planting, not to weaken or destroy, but to give greater strength and endurance for the time to come."—*Tyng.*

"Adam was soon drawn by Eve; Rehoboam's heart was easily led after the advice of his familiars; the women of Judah by their husbands easily fell to idolatry."—*Bernard.*

"This is Naomi's last trial of Ruth; and these words show plainly all was to try her, because she telleth Ruth of Orpah's going back, not only to her people, but also to her gods, which Naomi, a good woman, could not but hate, and could not so ill respect Ruth, and show so great coldness in religion and honour of the true God, as to dissuade Ruth from the same God of truth to return unto idols."—*Bernard.*

"The Saviour Himself cared not so much to be followed by the crowd, as to be served and loved by the few. Let the promiscuous multitude be gone, so that the handful left prove faithful and worthy! And even these He tries again and again. Strong enough to deny Himself of every faint-hearted and faithless disciple, and yet tender enough to weep after every such denial and desertion, it is so He speaks those pregnant and searching words of His to every one of us, Will *ye also* go away?"—*B.*

VERSES 16—18.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Entreat me not**—Urge me not (*Lange*), **Force me not** (*Wordsworth*), Be not against me (*Trem. Junius, Montan. Bernard, Fuller, Wright; Vulg., Wycliffe, and Douay Ver.*). **Thy people shall be** [is] **my people.** I will be a Jewess both in country and religion (*Wright*). This appears to be a form of compact and union, as we may infer from Zoheir's speech in Antar (vol. iii. 98): "If you engage, we will engage; if you fight, we will fight; if you die, we will die; yours is our property, and yours is all we possess" (*Kitto*). **Where thou lodgest,** abidest (*Lange*), stayest (*Keil*).

Ver. 17. **The Lord** [Jehovah] **do so.** The Eternal do so to me, and more also (*Benisch*, a Jewish translator, who invariably renders the word "Eternal.") **And more also,** Lit. And so may He add to do (*Keil*). This form of imprecation is frequent in the books of Samuel and Kings [cf. 1 Sam. iii. 17; 2 Sam. iii. 9; 1 Kings ii. 23; etc.] When the imprecation is followed by the thing which the speaker affirms shall happen, the affirmation is preceded, as here, by the particle כִּי that (*Speaker's Com.*) So Adam Clarke. Lange. כִּי is not if (*Lange*). Answers to *or* in the sense of *quod*, introducing a declaration (*Keil*). The E. V. might be corrected by leaving the particle untranslated, and rendering "Only death shall part thee and me (*Lange*). Death alone shall part thee and me (*Benisch*). So the LXX., I swear that death, and nothing else than death, shall separate us (*Keil*). I swear, or some such expression, is understood (*Lange*). The first occurrence of that common formula of an oath, by which the person swearing called down upon himself a stroke of Divine judgment in case he kept not his word nor carried out his resolutions (*Steele and Terry*). The Hebrew, instead of invoking a definite judgment or calamity on himself, in case he should break his oath, simply says כֹּה, which with the addition "and more also," is perhaps more awful to the imagination because it is not definite (*Lange*).

There is an antiphonal character in these words, which gives it almost the character of a musical chant: perhaps it was often on the lips of maidens of Israel (*Wordsworth*): comp. Ps. xlv. 10, "Hearken, O daughter," etc., and the rhythmical movement in Rom. viii. 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" etc. (*ibid*).

"And Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave thee and return from following after thee, for I desire to become a proselyte.' Said Naomi, 'We are commanded to observe the Sabbath and good days in not travelling more than two thousand cubits.' Said Ruth, 'To every place where thou goest I will go.' Said Naomi, 'We are commanded not to lodge with the Gentiles. Said Ruth, 'Wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge.' Said Naomi, 'We are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen precepts.' Said Ruth, 'What thy people keep, I will keep, as if they were my people from of old until now.' Said Naomi, 'We are commanded not to worship with a strange worship.' Said Ruth, 'Thy God shall Himself be my God.' Said Naomi, 'We have four kinds of capital punishment for criminals: stoning, burning, beheading, and hanging.' Said Ruth, 'In whatever way thou diest, I will die.' Said Naomi, 'We have a house of burial.' Said Ruth, 'And there will I be buried'" (*Chaldee Paraphrast*) So the Jewish expositors after the Targum (*Lange*).

Verse 18. **When** [and when] **That she was steadfastly minded.** Firmly resolved (*Lange, Wright*) that she strengthened herself (*Wordsworth*) with an oath (*Bernard, Fuller*). The verb means "to stiffen oneself firmly upon a thing" (*Keil, Braden*). ***She left speaking unto her.*** Ceased to dissuade her (*Lange, Cox*).

VERSES 16, 17.

Theme.—SACRED MOMENTS AND SOLEMN VOWS.

"Love's holy flame for ever burneth;
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth;
Too oft on earth a troubled guest,
At times deceived, at times oppress,
It here is tried and purified;
But hath in heaven its perfect rest:
It soweth here in toil and care,
But the harvest-time of love is there."—*Southey.*

And Ruth said, Entreat me not [be not against me] ***to leave thee, etc.***

Where thou diest, etc.

Ruth's famous reply to Naomi's dissuasive entreaties takes high rank among the sentences which the world will not willingly let die (*Cox*). Hard to say which is the more admirable,—Naomi in putting from her her sole comfort and

stay, or Ruth, in leaving all that she had to become the stay and comfort of Naomi's declining years (*ibid*). *God has chosen to confer singular honours upon women throughout the sacred Scriptures* (*Kitto*). As examples, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Anna, Mary, Lydia, and Dorcas may be mentioned. Ruth stands pre-eminent among them for the strength of her affections, and these have been the glory of woman always. Did ever the love of the human heart find a richer, sweeter expression than this? In the whole realm of literature where can they be equalled? They are absolutely matchless (*Braden*). The words become rhythmical and musical with the burden of love,—a love which solves all difficulties, and removes all obstacles. There are moments in life when the Godlike within us flashes forth, when we prove ourselves children of immortality; for we can face the ills of time, and look beyond them. Such a moment is this in the history of Ruth.

We have here, **I. The utterance of a pure, passionate, and personal affection** —pure, because unselfish; passionate, because intensely in earnest; and personal, for love naturally centres in a person [see on ver. 14, p. 60]. She sacrificed all the pleasures, all the friendships of her youth; all the hopes of better days in her own country, and she chooses banishment here, for Naomi's sake, as John for Christ's (Rev. i. 9). Note (*a*) *The Saviour demands a kindred sacrifice* of His disciples (Luke xiv. 33). (*b*) *The Christian's Patmos his way to Paradise* (Secker). "Now I begin to be a disciple," said Ignatius on his way to martyrdom. "I weigh neither visible nor invisible things, so that I may gain Christ. (*c*) *Adversity alike the test of sincerity and discipleship* [cf. Luke xxi. 16, 17; vi. 22].

Some translate, "Be not against me," [that is, in urging me to leave thee.] Ruth evidently was greatly distressed and moved by what Naomi had just said. To a heart like hers the mere thought of separation was unbearable. *See here then a mind fully persuaded.* She weighs neither pains nor penalties, and obstacles only make the decision more plain, as the refining fire serves to make the purity of the gold more apparent. Note (*a*) *They are against us who use reasons, and exhort us to turn back from well-doing* (Bernard). Christ called Peter "Satan," that is, adversary, when he gave Him counsel to do otherwise than His Father had appointed (*ibid*). (*b*) *The godly have a desire not to be hindered in a good course.* So it was with David when he had determined to meet Goliath. So Elisha, repeatedly urged, refused to leave Elijah. So Paul in his resolve to go onward to Jerusalem (Acts xxi. 13, 14). And so it must be always with the man of God. A holy boldness characterizes him; for the kingdom of heaven is to suffer violence, etc. (Matt. xi. 12).

We have here, then, **II. The expression of a choice made once and for ever.** Not a wish merely, but a strong, deliberate purpose, formed amid much apparent opposition, and expressed with an impassioned invocation on the name of Jehovah. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Opposition only makes her the more steadfast; she strengthened herself with an oath [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes on ver. 18]. "God do so to me," etc. The choice full [complete, whole-hearted], unlimited, affectionate, determined, final (*Belfrage*). No reserve, no conditions. Her creed not an election of the heart only, or a preference of the intellect, but a practical adoption (*Cumming*).

Notice of this choice, (1) *That it was a choice made in youth.* "I bless Thee, O God!" said Beza in his will, "for many things, but especially that I gave myself up to Thee at the early age of sixteen." Ruth probably older than this, though there can be little doubt she came to Bethlehem early in life. [Boaz, when he first meets her, asks, "Whose damsel is this?" and calls her daughter, ii. 5—8.] Life opening before her, the future untried, so she gives herself to the God of Israel, and comes to take shelter under His wing. To the young, life is yet fresh and new—in their hands it is plastic and pliable. They have the experiment of living yet to begin, and they are interested as none beside can be, in learning how to begin it well (*Binney*). **Note.** ***Early piety is likely to be eminent piety.*** Why

should not the powers of nature, in their first bloom and glory, adorn the kingdom of grace? (*Dr. Watts.*)

Notice, (2) *That it was a choice made for life and death.* Made in a moment, but made for all the future. See in it therefore, not only the expression of the old love for Naomi, but of the new hope and the new life dawning within the heart of Ruth. They have been together in Moab, in darkness, bondage, and misery, why should they not be together in the land of promise? How beautiful when companionship outside the covenant of Israel ends and even leads to companionship within the fold of Christ! Mark of this choice, (*a*) *It is to control all her actions,* her goings and abidings. "Where thou goest," etc. She takes Naomi for better or worse, for richer or poorer—makes no exception to any condition which may arise. So men must give themselves to Christ, as the disciples followed the Saviour. They were content with such lodgings as their Lord had for Himself (*Macgowan*).

Again, (*b*) *It is to influence all her hopes.* "Thy people shall be my people," etc. Religion creates a firmer kinship than nature. Grace in the heart overleaps such petty boundaries as nationality. "Hereby," says the inspired divine, "do we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Henceforward their hope is our hope, their lot our lot in time and in eternity.

So always. To us, to-day, there are two lands and two people. When we give ourselves to the Lord, we give ourselves to His people also. The love of Christ constrains us in this as in every other way. David's delight was not in one saint, but in "the saints;" and they that love one godly person for godliness' sake cannot but affect all the Lord's flock (*Bernard*). Mark, the Christian is no recluse, the Church is not a nunnery. "Thy people;" it is companionship, society, the general assembly of the church of the firstborn (*Cumming*).

Once more, (*c*) *It is to last as long as life itself.* Ruth thinks only of the future as it is joined to Naomi's, and in this she is the true type of the Christian convert. Death alone shall divide them; for death must divide all earthly friendships, at least, for awhile. "Where thou diest," etc. How strong the affinity which holds out for life, stronger still that which is for life and death! Nay, more, she is willing to take the risk of dying first, and she will not so much as have her body taken back to Moab. "There will I be buried," etc. Love alone strong as life itself, unquenchable and unchangeable, dare speak in language like this. And yet this is the only language Christ will listen to if we are to be His disciples. We are to hate father and mother for His sake; and if we love our own life, we shall lose it in loving Him. We take Him for life and for death, and the grave is not to separate us. Blessed compensation! To die the death of the righteous, to be buried with them, is to sleep in Jesus, to be with Christ, which is far better.

(3) *That it was a choice made for God and eternity.* Her nominal profession changed into an abiding principle (*Braden*). The climax here, "Thy God shall be my God." This confession the key-stone of her vow (*Lange*). Not merely chosen because He was Naomi's God (*Lawson*). No! And yet love to Naomi was the human spark kindling an altar flame to burn before God throughout the eternities. Mysterious truth, that we may be instruments of grace to our fellow-men! Friendship may lead upward to the love of God! Note, of this choice, in the last place, that (*d*) *It is to decide the great question of her destiny.* It places her within the Israel of God. It links her with the promises coming down from Abraham's time and Adam's. So it is "the seed of the woman," *this woman,* is to bruise the serpent's head. Happy choice! earnest of that day when men shall lay hold of the skirt of Him that is an Israelite indeed, saying, We will go with you; *for we have heard that God is with you* (Zech. viii. 23).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) The most painful part of religion comes first: God has provided "some better thing" further on (*Morlais Jones*). Poverty and misery awaited Ruth at first. (2) Self-denial is the only way to share the Israelite's hope. (3) With the truly earnest spirit, spiritual affections will always have the victory over carnal per-

suasions. (4) The love of goodness in men should lead to, and show itself finally in, the love of God Himself, the supreme good. "Thy God shall be my God," the language of every truly believing heart to the Church of Christ. A natural man may choose deliverance from hell, but no man doth ever choose God and Christ, and the spiritual benefits Christ hath purchased, and the happiness of God's people, till he is converted (*President Edwards*).

Tyng on this (condensed) :—

Theme.—THE CHOICE OF YOUTH.

Ruth's faithful choice remains a permanent and everlasting pattern to all who hear the gospel in their youth.

I. **It was an humble choice**: nothing to offer but herself; no claim to present; fears she may be a burden and unwelcome. So when the Holy Spirit brings the soul to Jesus, she comes as a beggar. But in all her conscious unworthiness she chooses Christ as her portion and her Lord.

II. **It was an affectionate choice**: personal, tender. Can leave Moab without regret; can part with earthly friends, but she cannot leave Naomi. (Entreat, etc.) To such a choice the Saviour would lead us; not one of duty merely, or obligation, of fear or necessity. Not the mere remedy and recourse of disappointment and weariness; not the constrained denial of self, of appetite, and loved indulgence; not an involuntary, sorrowful relinquishment of a world that was loved as long as it bloomed, and has been forsaken only because it has faded. No. The world was never brighter. It is the perception of something infinitely more precious, the choice of the Saviour, etc. As freely as the falling drop mingles with the current, does the affectionate heart embrace and resolve to go with Him.

III. **It was an entire choice**—no hesitation. The contrasting claims of Moab were nothing. She made the exchange—the transfer of herself—freely, completely, and without reserve. So the true convert makes a complete surrender of herself to the Lord. Like Saul, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" None but Christ the language of her youthful heart.

IV. **It was a determined choice**: amazing dignity and firmness in her stand. Useless all attempts to lead her back to Moab. So in the history of early martyrdoms for Christ. "I am a Christian," the gentle but firm reply to every solicitation to recant. An open, sincere, and determined choice of Christ leads us into a harbour of rest. So Paul: "None of these things move me" (Acts xx. 24).

V. **It was an instant choice.** Asked no time for consideration. She staggered not in unbelief, nor wavered amidst conflicting motives.

When Ruth's faithful choice was thus made, she was allowed to go on her way in peace. The young convert's sincerity was proved. There she stood, acknowledged, honoured, and accepted, as a chosen traveller for Immanuel's land.

McCheyne on this :—

We should cleave to our converted friends. Follow those who follow Christ.

I. Their God is a precious God; sin pardoning, faithful.
II. Their people are a happy people.
III. They want you to go with them.
IV. If you do not go, there will be an eternal separation between you. How strange that two trees should grow so near—one to flower in Paradise, the other to be a firebrand in hell. Can you bear the thought of such a separation?

Ferris on this :—

I. A beautiful illustration of the influence of true affection.
II. An illustration of the character and feelings of the true convert.
III. One of the richest sources of parental joy.
IV. An encouragement to pious example and effort.

Cox on this :—

Three points should be noted. (1) That in these words Ruth meets every

dissuasive plea of Naomi. Naomi had no home, no asylum to offer; and Ruth replies, "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge." Naomi reminds her that she is going among an alien people, who worship another God; and Ruth replies, "Thy people shall be my people." Naomi urges that there will be no brightness, no *life* in her life; and Ruth replies that she is content to die, so that she may share Naomi's grave. (2) That Ruth adopts Naomi's God, as yet, purely from love of Naomi. And (3) that she shows how instantly and entirely she adopts Naomi's religion by sealing her vow with her Hebrew oath, and by calling on the God of the Hebrews, "Jehovah do so to me, and more also," etc.

"Her vow has stamped itself on the very heart of the world; and that not because of the beauty of its form simply, though even in our English version it sounds like a sweet and noble music, but because it expresses in a worthy form, and once for all, the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering love. It is the spirit which informs and breathes through these melodious words that makes them so precious to us, and that also renders it impossible to utter any fitting comment on them. They shine most purely in their own light."—*Cox.*

"Love is a giant—it heapeth mountains upon mountains, and thinks the pile but little; it is a mighty mystery, for it changes bitter into sweet; it calls death life, and life death; and it makes pain less painful than enjoyment."—*Spurgeon.*

"Love here is surrounded by the other graces, and divides the honours with them; but they will have felt the warp of night and of darkness when it will shine luminous against the sky of eternity."—*Beecher.*

"Love is a marvellous magician. Let the soul but feel its mighty touch, and you dare not prophesy the results. Men and women, commonplace enough in the ordinary affairs of life, become poets and heroes under the influence of its mysterious inspirations. The slowest tongue grows eloquent, timidity loses its fear, and is brave for all duty and sacrifice, and even death looks not terrible to the clear eyes of love."—*Braden.*

"Love does not aim simply at the conscious good of the beloved object; it is not satisfied without perfect loyalty of heart; it aims at its own completeness."—*George Eliot.*

"The love of Thee flows just as much
As that of ebbing self subsides;
Our hearts (their scantiness is such)
Bear not the conflict of two rival tides."
Madame Guyon.

"Of all that human was or is,
Alone unchanging is Thy love,
Thy love to us, and ours to Thee,
Responsive turns to heaven above.

True as the needle to the pole,
True as the branches to the vine:
Oh blessed hope! if kept by Thee,
Amid these changes we are Thine."
B.

"After a little, when a man has fairly committed himself to a Christian life, many of those things which have been against him turn round, and are like winds in his sails to help him. The great thing is to begin—to begin honestly, to begin with the help of Christ and God—*to begin.* For this is one of those cases in which to begin is half the journey. And where a man is willing to say to his companion, or to some friend or Christian brother, 'The time past suffices in which I have lived a worldly life, and I am going, by the grace of God, to begin to lay the foundations of a Christian life,' in many and many cases the crisis is past. You may not have joy to-day, nor for weeks; but you are on the way toward it. It may not be conversion; but will stand ultimately connected with it. . . . When Peter was in prison, and he was aroused by an angel in the night, that touched his chains, and caused them to fall off, when first he opened his eyes, and beheld the angel, his rescue had begun. His rescue had begun before his chains fell, before the prison-door was thrown back, before he passed the keeper."—*Beecher.*

"To follow Naomi was not simply to go with one whose piety was deep and true, and whose ability to teach the doctrines of a diviner faith might be measured by her character and her personal affection, but to go into a land of piety, where the service of God was publicly celebrated; where instruction might be received in the Divine law, and where everything around would tell of the worship of Jehovah. Who that has thought at all of the subtle influence of daily surroundings, or attempted to measure the effects of a moral atmosphere, that may be peculiar to the age in which he lives, does not know what this would mean?"—*M. Timson.*

"I would not even ask a Hindoo to give up the religion that he has, so great is the sacrifice, unless I could supersede it by a more comforting, a more glorious religion, the religion of light and liberty, and life and truth."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls, are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask, they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wear here make them strangers."—*Penn.*

"Our vows are cruel to ourselves, if they demand nothing but gentle zephyrs, and flowery fields, and calm repose, as the lot of our life; for these pleasant things often prove the most dangerous enemies to our nobler and dearer life."—*Leighton.*

"Making thus the Lord my choice,
I have nothing more to choose,
But to listen to Thy voice,
And my will in Thine to lose:
Thus whatever may betide,
I shall safe and happy be;
Still content and satisfied,
Having all in having Thee."

"Some men will follow Christ on certain conditions;—if He will not lead them through rough roads—if He will not enjoin them any painful tasks—if the sun and wind do not annoy them—if He will remit a part of His plan and order. But the true Christian, who has the spirit of Jesus, will say, as Ruth said to Naomi, 'Whither thou goest, I will go,' whatever difficulties and dangers may be in the way."

"The upright in heart are like Ruth: whatsoever becometh of the gospel, they will be sharers with it in the same condition; be it affliction, or be it prosperity; be it comfort, or be it sorrow; be it fair weather, or be it foul; be it light, or be it darkness; they will take their lot with it."—*Caryl.*

"See here the large extent of a saint's love; it lasts till death: and no wonder; for it is not founded upon honour, beauty, or wealth, or any other sinister respect in the party beloved, which is subject to age or mutability, but only on the grace and piety in him; which foundation, because it always lasteth, that love which is built upon it is also perpetual."—*Fuller.*

"Carnal affections cannot prevail over spiritual convictions. The sinner who is in earnest for salvation will be deaf to invitations to go back. The more he is solicited by them, the faster he will flee from them."—*Mason's Notes on the Pilgrim's Progress.*

"A good companion, saith the Latin proverb, is *pro viatico;* I may add also, *pro diversorio.* Ruth, so be it she may enjoy Naomi's gracious company, will be content with any lodging, though happily it may be no better than Jacob had. And yet we see how some had been discouraged even from the company of our Saviour, for fear of hard lodging. Witness the scribe, to whom our Saviour said, 'The foxes have their holes,' etc."—*Fuller.*

"It has not in any age been common for the greatest of saints to have the softest beds and most comfortable lodgings; and yet, in every age, God has had His followers and witnesses, and the Church her unfeigned lovers."—*Maggowan.*

"When those that we have formerly been conversant with are turning to God and to His people, their example ought to influence us. Their example should be looked upon as a call from God, to do as they have done. God, when He changes the heart of one, calls upon another, especially does He loudly call on those that have been their friends and acquaintances. We have been influenced by their example in evil, and shall we cease to follow them when they make the wisest choice that ever they made, and do the best thing that ever they did?"—*President Edwards.*

"In our narrative, the confession of Ruth, 'Thy God is my God,' is the highest stage of that devotion which she yields to Naomi for life. She has vowed that nothing shall separate her love from its object; for whatever could separate it would make it imperfect. But since the God of Israel is the true ground of all the love which she felt for her Israelitish friends, it follows that her confession of Him is the keystone of her vow. It is at the same time the true solution of the conflict into which persons who mutually loved each other had fallen. It rectifies the error committed by her husband when he took the Moabitish woman, notwithstanding her relation to the idol of Moab. The unity of the Spirit has been attained, which not only shows true love, but even in memory reconciles what was amiss in the past. For Naomi's grief was so great, not only because she had lost her sons, but also because the daughters-in-law which she had must be given up, and she be left alone. And as love enforced the separation, so love also became the cord drawing to a yet closer union. If Naomi believed herself fallen out of the favour of God on Moab's account, she could derive comfort from Ruth, who for her sake entered into the people of God."—*Lange.*

"She was unchangeably resolved. So was that martyr who said, 'The heavens will sooner fall than I will forsake my profession.' I will follow the Lamb wheresoever He goeth. The hop in its growing windeth itself about the pole, and always followeth the course of the sun from east to west, so that it can by no means be drawn to the contrary, but chooseth rather to break than to yield."—*Trapp.*

"I have oftentimes noted, when women receive the doctrine of the gospel, they are more fervent in faith, they hold it more stiff and fast than men do, as we see in the loving Magdalen, who was more hearty and bold than Peter."—*Luther.*

"To her religion is no weak and drivelling fanaticism, but a life, a power, a heavenly glory."—*Wadsworth.*

"Naomi had said, and there was a sifting emphasis in her words, 'Thy sister has gone back unto her people and to her gods.' Ruth says, 'Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"—*Price.*

"O beautiful example,
For youthful minds to heed!
The good we do to others
Shall never miss its meed;
The love of those whose sorrows
We lighted shall be ours,
And o'er the path we walk in
That love shall scatter flowers."
Bryant

VERSE 18.

Theme.—STEADFAST-MINDEDNESS.

"When all things have their trial, you shall find
Nothing is constant but a virtuous mind"—*Shirley.*

"I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true, fixed, and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament."—*Shakespeare.*

[And] *when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto* [ceased to dissuade] *her.*

Older expositors have imagined that Naomi's efforts to persuade her daughters-in-law to return homeward were not altogether seriously meant . . . a dogmatic anachronism (*Lange*). The efforts to be looked upon as sincere, but limited in the direction the text points out; *when she saw*, etc. Only the omniscient God Himself can read the heart, and yet even He sees fit to try and to test His children. But mark, in a case like this, friendship can dissuade no longer, when love shows itself to be firmly resolved, "steadfastly minded."

Note. *After proof and trial made of their fidelity, we are to trust our brethren, without any further suspicion* (*Fuller*). Not to try before we trust is want of wisdom; not to trust after we have tried is want of charity (*ibid*). Naomi the elder, yet she yielded (*Braden*).

Learn, I. **That steadfast-mindedness does much to bring trial itself to an end.** The discipline of life has accomplished its purpose when it becomes plain and apparent that we are "fully persuaded." Ephraim is fully persuaded to evil, and God says, "Let him alone." Ruth is steadfastly minded towards good, and no further hindrances are to be placed in her way.

Note. (*a*) *Deciding for ourselves, we help others to a decision;* even those who love us and seek our best welfare. So, too, decision for Christ, and confession of Christ—the making it plain that we have chosen God's people to be ours—will bring those to be with us who formerly may have seemed to be against us. (*b*) *Many of the hindrances to our best and highest life are not meant permanently to hinder us.* They are obstacles only for the moment placed in our way, that we may overcome them, and use them as stepping-stones to higher things: at their worst they are only intended to hold us back from entering the kingdom until we are "fully persuaded." God wrestled with Jacob, with a desire to be conquered; so Naomi no doubt opposed Ruth, hoping and wishing that she herself might be foiled (*Fuller*). (*c*) *Opposition will cease generally the moment it is plain that opposition is in vain.* It is the wavering mind which invites persuasion, courts opposition; men spare their breath when they see that we are steadfastly minded, as the disciples at Cæsarea did with Paul (Acts xxi. 14).

Learn, II. **That earnestness of character is the secret of perseverance and final success on the human side.** "Hard pounding, gentlemen; but we will see who can pound the longest" (*Wellington at Waterloo*). The steadfast-minded are like the oak, deep-rooted, and so unmoved; like the iceberg in a swelling sea: the cause of its steadiness is its depth (*Arnot*). Lange and others translate "firmly resolved." The one phrase points to the cause, the other to its effect. Note. *With such to be fully persuaded is to be steadfast-minded.* This steady earnestness of purpose is like the vital energy in the animal and vegetable creation, without which they would languish and die (*Pilkington*).

We have here the silvern side of the shield of truth illustrated, viz., that we continue in the heavenward course, just as Ruth went onward towards the earthly Canaan, because we are fully persuaded and so steadfast-minded. (cf. Heb. xii.) Said of the Patriarchs, "they were persuaded," and that "if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out," like Ruth "they might have had opportunity to have returned."

The other and golden side of truth also illustrated here. Mark, *the influences came from Naomi, which bound Ruth to Naomi*, the attractions drawing her onward to Canaan came from that other and better land. So, too, in spiritual things we "are persuaded," but we are persuaded "of Him." In all affection which is to be lasting there must be the influences which attract, as well as the mind and spirit capable of being attracted. Love and life are always influenced from without. We speak of an affection laying hold of us. And note, it is only the life anchored within the veil by faith, "hid with Christ in God," which will bear without breaking the strain and stress of the storm.

So, too, Ruth was not without her own misgivings and realization of the weakness which is ours always. The Hebrew reads it "that she strengthened herself," that being their phrase to express an oath (*Fuller*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) Divine moment when a man can say that he is "fully persuaded." Henceforward the problem of life may be looked upon as solved—the light that shone upon our path has become a fixed and guiding star. (2.) A distinct step too, in all true progress, when others perceive our steadfast-mindedness to go onward. It is certain, my belief gains quite infinitely the moment I can convince another mind thereof (*Carlyle*). (3.) As the gold is not known but by the touchstone, so is not any Christian till he be thoroughly tried (*Topsell*).

Bernard on this :—

I. The godly wise are wary in their admittance of others into their company, till they well know them.

II. Words with an oath, and actions agreeing sufficiently, may persuade us of the steadfastness of the heart, and the inward disposition of the mind of such as show themselves virtuous.

III. An oath is the strengthening of the mind of him that sweareth.

IV. There is no reason to make further trial, where an honest resolution is or may be well discerned.

LESSONS.—Learn (1.) To try before we trust, and then to trust after sound trial. (2.) Not to put to further trial than need is, lest we weaken faith, etc.

"When Constantine was chosen emperor, he found several Christians in office; and he issued an edict requiring them to renounce their faith, or quit their places. Most of them gave up their offices to preserve their conscience; but some *cringed*, and renounced Christianity. When the emperor had thus made full proof of their dispositions of character, he removed all who basely complied with his *supposed* wishes, and retained the others; saying that those who would desert or deny their Divine Master would desert him, and were not worthy of his confidence."—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

"After supper, the dean having decanted a bottle of wine, poured what remained into a glass, and seeing it was muddy, presented it to Mr. Pilkington to drink it. 'For,' said he, 'I always keep some poor person to drink the foul wine for me.' Mr. Pilkington, entering into his humour, thanked him, and told him 'he did not know the difference, but was glad to get a glass at any rate.' 'Why then,' said the dean, 'you shan't, for I'll drink it myself.'"—*Sheridan's Life of Swift.*

"The goldsmith must purify the dross and ore from the gold, but he must be wary lest he make waste of good metal, if over-curious in too often refining. We may search and sound the sincerity of our brethren; but after good experience made of their uprightness, we must take heed lest, by continual sifting and proving them, we offend a weak Christian. Christ tried the woman of Syrophœnicia first with silence, then with two sharp answers; at last, finding her to be sound, He dismissed her with granting her request, and commending of her faith. When He had said to Peter the third time 'Lovest thou Me?' He rested satisfied with Peter's answer, and troubled him with no more questions."—*Fuller.*

"As soldiers, when they have long besieged a city, with the loss of time, money, and men, being hopeless to take it, they even sound a retreat, and retire home without accomplishing their desire; so Naomi, perceiving that all her arguments which she used to conquer Ruth, like water in the smith's forge cast on coals, did more intend [intensify] the heat of her constancy, gives over in my text."—*Fuller.*

"The mind can never be steady, whilst it stands upon other's feet, and till it be settled upon such grounds of assurances, that it will rather lead than follow; and can say with Joshua, whatsoever become of the world, 'I and my house will serve the Lord.'"—*Bishop Hall.*

"There is all the difference in the world between firmness and obstinacy, though they are constantly confounded. Firmness is a conscientious adherence to what is held to be right after a careful examination of the reasons that can be given for the opposite

course. Stubbornness is the tenacious maintenance of a position, whether it be right or wrong."—*Braden.*

"Naomi teaches us that there is 'a time to speak and a time to keep silence,' a time to entreat and a time to refrain from entreating, a time to argue and a time to yield in the argument, a time even when parents should concede to the wishes of their children, though contrary to their own judgment."—*Braden.*

"When our Saviour Christ had dealt with the Canaanitish woman about the like cause, seeing that silence would not answer her, nor denial satisfy her, nor the opprobrious word of dog dismay her, then He yielded to her desire, cured her daughter, and proclaimed her faith to be wonderful."—*Topsell.*

VERSES 19—21.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**So they two.** Types of the Jewish and Gentile Churches (*Macgowan*). Amicitia sit inter binos qui sunt veri, et bonos qui sunt pauci (*Trapp*). **Went.** They were obliged to travel on foot (*Patrick, Gill*). If the more southern route was chosen, they would descend from the high table-land of Moab, cross the plain at the south-western extremity of the Dead Sea, part of the once larger vale of Siddim, where stood the cities of the plain, the soil of which is entirely covered with salt (*Eadie*), then turn northwards up the Wady Sudier to Engedi, and so to Bethlehem. If the more northern route, they would cross the two fords of Arnon and Jordan. In either case one of the most weird and desolate landscapes in the world, the scene of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, lay before them (cf. Deut. xxix. 23). **Came to Bethlehem** [cf. *Intro.*, p. 13]. **All the city was moved** [cf. 1 Sam. iv. 5; 1 Kings i. 45]. All the city was in a commotion about them (*Benisch*). ἤχησε ἡ πολις. The city rang *with the news* (LXX.). All the city rejoiced at them (*Arab, Syriac*). The E.V. rightly uses the more comprehensive term which may include curiosity, surprise, gladness, etc. Amazement not so much at the fact that Naomi was still alive and had come back again, as at her returning in so mournful a condition (*Keil*). **And they said.** They in the Hebrew is feminine. The women of Bethlehem said (*Speaker's Com.*). Not exactly, *dicebantque mulieres*, as the Vulg. has it; the population of the city are the subject of the verb, but in a matter of this kind women would naturally be so prominent as to lead the narrator insensibly to use the feminine. Perhaps Naomi arrived in an hour of the day when the labours of the field left none but women in the city (*Lange*). The Midrash makes the scene still more dramatic by the explanation that the concourse of the inhabitants was occasioned by the fact that the first wife of Boaz had that very day been carried to her grave (*Lange*). May possibly have been some such public occasion.

Ver. 20. **Call me not Naomi** [pleasant. See on ver. 2, p. 14]. **Call me Mara** [bitter; LXX. πικαν; comp. Exod. xv. 23]. I have no more anything that is pleasant about me: my life, like a salty, bitter spring, is without flavour or relish (*Lange*). A similar allusion to the meaning of names, Gen. xxvii. 36; Jer. xx. 3 (*Speaker's Com.*). From this we gather that Naomi was not the name given her at first by her parents, but a popular name commonly given her by her neighbours, because of her comely presence and courteous behaviour (*Patrick?*) **The Almighty** [Shaddai]. The name Almighty is almost peculiar to the Pentateuch and to the Book of Job, in which last it is found thirty times. It occurs twice in the Psalms and four times in the prophets (*Speaker's Com.*). Why is Shaddai used here? Must be connected with its pregnant, proper signification (*Lange*), the source of fruitfulness and life. Used continually as in Gen. xxxv. 11; I am El Shaddai: be fruitful and multiply. The word must therefore unquestionably be referred to a root שָׁדָה still used in Arabic in the sense "to water, to fertilize." [See *Lange in loco.*] Naomi was rightly named, when with a flourishing family she went to Moab; but now Shaddai, who gave the blessing, has taken it away (*Lange*). Rashi and Adam Clarke explain Shaddai to mean self-sufficient. **Hath dealt very bitterly with me;** has worked against me (*Bertheau*); hath testified against [lit. hath answered] me (*Wordsworth*); hath inflicted bitter sorrow upon me (*Lange*); hath made me very sad (*Wright*). [Comp. Exod. xx. 16; 2 Sam. i. 16; Job x. 17; Mal. iii. 5.] A metaphor from adversaries at law (*Trapp*). So Job says, "Thou writest bitter things against me" (xiii. 26).

Ver. 21. **I went out full.** That is, in the rich possession of a husband and two sons (*Steele and Terry*). **Home again empty.** The very reverse of Jacob's experience (Gen. xxxii. 10): "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." Cf. Hannah's song (1 Sam. ii. 5), "They that were full have hired out themselves for bread." Though the Hebrew "full," there meaning *full of food*, is quite different from that here used, which is the opposite of empty (*Speaker's Com.*). **The Lord** [*Jehovah*] **hath testified against me.** Και κυριος εταπεινωσε με (LXX.). The reading of the LXX., "He humbled me," was justly departed from, for it is only a paraphrase of the sense (*Lange*). Quam Dominus humiliavit (*Vulg.*). The Lord has brought me back in vain (*Syr.*), has sent down upon me a terrible punishment (*Arab.*). On the whole, we incline to prefer the ordinary translation (*Wright*). So Lange, Tremel., Drusius, Gesen., Rosenm. That which Bertheau considers to be the difficulty of the passage, that it makes God to testify against a person, while elsewhere only men bear testimony,

is precisely the special thought of Naomi. "I went," she says, "and God has testified that this going was a sin" (*Lange*). In the loss of my children and family, says Naomi, I perceive that He "declares me guilty," as the Targum excellently renders it (*ibid*). Comp. for a similar turn of thought, 1 Kings xvii. 18, followed at ver. 20 by the identical word here rendered **hath afflicted, there thou hast brought evil** (*Speaker's Com.*).

VERSE 19.

Theme.—COMPANIONSHIP IN PROGRESS.

"Along the solitary plain we went,
As one who unto the lost road returns,
And till he finds it seems to go in vain."—*Dante.*

"Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way,
But to act, that each to-morrow
Finds us farther than to day."—*Longfellow.*

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.

In life action is everything, and joy and sorrow come of themselves (*Goethe*). Onward with these two means that they are nearer every moment to Canaan, the land of promise, and Bethlehem, the house of bread. A rough way, but the right way (*Philpot*)—a difficult journey, but a wise one; onward from weakness to strength, poverty to riches, disquietude to rest. Moab behind them, the promised land in front.

"Linked hand in hand they went, tears in their eyes,
As faint and beautiful as eyes of flowers."—*Alexander Smith.*

Note. *Pilgrimage is the appointed lot of God's saints;* for true life is always moving onward, progressing.

We have here, I. **Companionship in Progress.** *They two went.* Their *principles* were one, the life and love of God in the soul. Their *object* was one, to come and trust in the shadow of the Divine wings (ii. 12). Their *interest* was common, the salvation of their souls and communion by the way (*Macgowan*). So Lot and his daughters went hand in hand out of Sodom, led of the angels to a place of safety. Note. *The world is our wilderness,* and we are happy only as the path leads us onward to a place of rest. *They came to Bethlehem* [the house of bread]. How many accompany each other to Bethaven! [house of iniquity.] Our travellers are an emblem of the righteous, who hold on their way, etc. (*Macgowan*). They went together lovingly, they ceased not to go on, they did not linger, they took no by-paths, neither forgot they whither they were going, till they came unto Bethlehem (*Bernard*). See also on ver. 6, 7; pp. 32—36.

II. **Mutual sympathy in affliction.**—The Holy Spirit mentioneth not what discourse they exchanged by the way; yet no doubt they were neither silent, nor busied in unprofitable talk (*Fuller*). Note. *Two things prevented them sinking into despair, their piety and their mutual love.* An instance here of God's faithfulness in restoring comfort to His mourners. Elimelech and his sons taken. Ruth given as a fast friend. When Abraham lost Sarah, Rebekah is brought into her tent (*Macgowan*). Note. (*a*) *True companionship embraces three things, love, unity, and constancy.* Friends must be of one mind and one heart, if they would journey together. These united in an indissoluble bond of love (*Cox*). (*b*) *Only in looking heavenward, not in looking earthward, do what we call union, mutual love, society, begin to be possible* (*Carlyle*).

III. **Fellowship and communion in desire and hope.**—Both are journeying to join the Israel of God. Probably they were beguiling the way by anticipations of the future; for now that Naomi has taken Ruth more closely to herself, their interests are inseparable, whatever may unfold. Note. *They are to be admitted unto our fellowship, whom we find to be constant in a good course, and true lovers of*

goodness, whatsoever they were before (*Bernard*). Thus God's angels deal with us; they will account us their fellow-servants when we turn to God (*ibid*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1.) God leaves His saints generally neither companionless nor comfortless. Luke, Mark, Titus, Timothy given and sent at different times to Paul [cf. 2 Cor. vii. 6]. And where man's company fails, He will send His angels. Jacob was comforted of heaven when earth failed him (Gen. xxviii. 12). And when the disciples slept in Gethsemane, an angel appeared strengthening the Saviour. (2.) Success always attends our efforts when they are in accordance with Divine purposes. *They came to Bethlehem.* Naomi is at home once more; and for the first time Ruth stands on the sacred spot where the Saviour is to be born. How much depended upon the journey, humanly speaking! Fit emblem of another journey to another land of promise.

"Is it a long way off?
Oh! no, a few more years,
A few more bitter tears,—
We shall be there.
Sometimes the way seems long
Our comforters all go,
Woe follows after woe,
Care after care."
* * * *
'Tis no uncertain way
We tread, for Jesus still
Leads with unerring skill
Where'er we roam;
And from the desert wild
Soon shall our path emerge,
And land us on the verge
Of our dear home."—*E. W. Dic. of Poetic Illustrations.*

"Naomi's heart throbs with mingled feelings as they pass along the way traversed by her and her venerated dead some ten years before. The sight of the beloved city and the familiar spots quickens a crowd of painful memories. Those who have returned to their native country and their childhood's home after a prolonged absence know too well how everything looks familiar yet strange, old yet sometimes new, and a thousand thoughts throng to the mind, and tearful emotions surge in the heart, at every turn of the way."—*Braden.*

"A man may turn whither he pleases, and undertake anything whatsoever, but he will always return to the path which nature has prescribed for him."—*Goethe.*

"Often again in his course of life man feels as a feathered seed driven by winds; as if, without weight or power, he slowly floats or is swiftly hurried, but rests nowhere. He feels that within him is life, but knows that he is as yet an embryo. He is confusedly conscious of what his tendencies are, but cannot tell what his outgrowth will be. . . . Let him but find resting place, and he also will put forth buds and boughs, and array himself in beauty."—*Lynch.*

"Life is only bright when it proceedeth
Towards a truer, deeper life above;
Human love is sweetest when it leadeth
Towards a more divine and perfect love.

Learn the mystery of progression duly;
Do not call each glorious change decay;
But know, we only hold our treasures truly
When it appears as if they fade away.

Nor dare to blame God's gifts for incompleteness—
In that want their beauty lies: they roll
Towards some infinite depths of love and sweetness,
Bearing onwards man's reluctant soul!"
Adelaide A. Proctor.

"Men's mid-day, cold, and slow pace to heaven will cause many a man to want his lodgings at night, and to lie in the fields."—*Fuller.*

"To walk with Love in Love's own country will be as easy as it is happy; but here, where love is put upon its trial, it is not so. It is to walk as with a thorn in your foot, which gives great pain at every step—new pain in an old wound."—*Lynch.*

"Permanent rest is not to be expected on the road, but at the end of the journey."—*Dillwyn.*

"Though God may bring us into the wilderness, yet if He speak comfortably to us, the wilderness will be turned into a paradise. . . . If the road is rough, let us not complain for it leads to a glorious rest which nothing shall disturb."—*Charles.*

"Make all plain and clear, and what sphere is there left for that trust by which the soul learns to lean upon God Himself? To see all the pathway, and know whither it leads, and what are the difficulties in the way, and how they are to be avoided, that is sight,

and not faith. But when 'light is given, and yet the way is hid,' when the little we know points to a deeper mystery, and beyond there is the darkness and uncertainty from which the spirit shrinks and life holds back, when we stand like the Israelites at the Red Sea, the swollen waters in front, the mountains on either hand, the enemy behind, and none to help us but God; it is then that faith either falters and fails, or triumphs and shows itself inestimable, most precious when most needed, just as the miner's candle is valued beyond all else when the gloom is densest and the way most intricate."—*B.*

"The more the cross, the more the longing:
Out of the vale man upward goes;
Whose pathway through the desert lies;
He craves the land where Jordan flows:
When here the dove finds no repose,
Straight to the ark with joy she flies."
Schmolk.

"It is a mere and miserable solitude to want true friends, without which the world is but a wilderness. . . . There is no man that imparteth his joys to his friend, but he joyeth the more; and no man that imparteth his griefs, but he grieveth the less."—*Bacon.*

"Then I saw in my dream, they went very lovingly on together, and had sweet discourse of all things that had happened to them in their pilgrimage."—*Bunyan.*

"It is with Christians as with burning coals. If these are scattered far apart, one after the other is easily extinguished, but when collected together, the fire of one preserves that of the other, and the glowing coals often ignite others that lie near."—*Franke.*

"'Daughter,' ye softly said—'Peace to thine heart;
We too—yes, daughter!—have been as thou art,
Tossed on the troubled waves, life's stormy sea;
Chance and change manifold proving like thee,
Hope-lifted, doubt-depressed, seeing in part,
Tried, troubled, tempted, sustained as thou art:
Our God is *thy* God; what He willeth is best:
Trust Him as we trusted, then rest as we rest.'"
Caroline Southey.

VERSE 19.

Theme.—A CITY IN ASTONISHMENT.

"The blast of death
Hath stript our roof trees; the guardian boughs
Hang like sad willows o'er the stream of life,—
Where drifting slowly by our native shores,
Familiar faces smile on us no more."—*Mackay.*

And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

Naomi's return was no common occurrence. Probably the inhabitants of Bethlehem never expected to see her more (*Lawson*). The city, and especially the women, were thrown into a peaceable uproar. Everybody ran, told the news, and wondered (*Lange*). The great change in Naomi's circumstances apparent in her appearance, in her very way of entering Bethlehem. Ten years ago she had left under far different circumstances. She went out with a husband, children, wealth; as she herself says, "full." The story well remembered, for the family was a prominent one in Bethlehem; natural that the news of her return, poor and sorrowful, should spread like wildfire, and create what to her was an unpleasant sensation (*Lange*). Is this Naomi? Note. *No questions cut so keenly as those which remind us of beloved ones who have passed into the shadow of death* (*Braden*).

See in these words, **I. The language of surprise and astonishment.** Strange! Wonderful! Is this she who was once so wealthy? How quickly is a river of riches drained dry! (*Fuller.*) Is this, *can it be, Naomi?* Time and sorrow, too, had wrought their cruel work upon her. Ten years, and such troubles as hers, leave terrible marks at her time of life (*Braden*). The rose withered unlike what it was when blooming (*Matt. Henry*). She that formerly was so fair, now one can scarcely read the traces of beauty in her face (*Fuller*). Is *this* Naomi? Note. (*a*) *The more renowned any are in prosperity, the more remarkable are they in*

adversity (*Bernard*). Men are more carried away by the consideration of the outward means how things come to pass, than of the power and pleasure of God to make such an alteration (*ibid*). And so (*b*) *God's providential doings are a continual cause of surprise*—as full of mystery as they are of mercy; necessarily so if faith is to have its perfect work. He brings about great changes in persons, families, cities, countries. And that often in ways least expected. The poor are exalted, the rich cast down; empires seemingly established for ever, like Babylon and Rome, coming to nought; cities destroyed, etc. (Cf. Lam. ii. 15, "Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty?" etc.; Rev. xviii. 15—17.)

II. The language of condemnation. May be feared there was more blame than pity in the exclamation (*Cox*). See! see! this is she that could not be content to tarry at home to take part of the famine with the rest of her fellows (*Fuller*). Perhaps they were *moved about her*, lest she should be a charge to the town, she looked so bare (*Matt. Henry*). Men judge mainly by outward appearances

> "Virtue without success
> Is a fair picture shown by an ill light."—*Dryden.*

Under the old economy, too, adversity was looked upon largely as meaning punishment. Only the nobler spirits seem to realize the meaning and ministry of suffering. A trace of this to be found among the heathens, as in the seven years' probation of Eneas:—

> "Long labours, both by sea and land, he bore,
> And in the doubtful war, before he won
> The Sabian realm, and built the destined town."—*Virgil.*

But even this was associated with fate and "the wrath of the gods." Note. *The multitude in all ages have traced afflictions to the anger of the Deity.* (See Job viii. 6, xi. 20, etc.) Difficult for Christians to realize always that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

So that we may have here, III. The language of contempt. The crowd come and look upon a spectacle like this, and then pass away to their usual avocations, some at least pointing the finger of scorn. David was cursed of Shimei in his affliction, and God's prophet saluted with the cry, "Go up, thou bald head." The man of God must expect to be misunderstood in all that concerns him, even in the Divine dealings with him. Christ said to His disciples, "The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service." Note. *Hatred to the good seems inherent to the evil heart; and poverty brings contempt upon the best.* Proud hearts take contempt in adversity as worse than death (*Bernard*); but we must learn to bear it as Naomi, as David, as Christ did.

We may have here, IV. The language of pity and commiseration. Alas! alas! is not this that gracious woman, that godly saint, which formerly by her charity relieved many in distress? How soon is a full clod turned into parched earth! one that supplied others into one that needeth to be supplied by others! (*Fuller.*) "*How has the gold become dim!*" Those that had seen the magnificence of the first temple wept when they saw the meanness of the second (*Matt. Henry*). There are always hearts that are touched in a right way at the sight of sorrow and trouble. The priest and the Levite may come and look on and pass by on the other side; but some good Samaritan draws nearer sooner or later to pour in oil and wine into the open wounds. Naomi evidently moved by the expression, Is this Naomi? She utters no word of reproach afterwards against the inhabitants of Bethlehem. Note. *Good and godly people do not less esteem the virtuous because of their outward low estate and poverty* (*Bernard*). The poor around us test the sincerity of our professions of religion. Christ will say at last, "Inasmuch as ye did it not," etc.

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) The same language may have a very different meaning in different lips. (2) Our very surprise at adversity should be mingled with com-

passion, and meted out with sympathy. Idle words, how they wound the broken heart! Is this Naomi? brings back the memory of all the past. (3) In adversity we should be comforters, not as Job's friends, who sat down and censured him, nor as Christ's and St. Paul's, who forsook them (*Bernard*), not even as Naomi's, whose casual words open the fountains of grief afresh; but as those who themselves have suffered, and have the meek and gentle spirit suffering only can bring. (4) When we remark the sad changes which numbers suffer, we should be reminded to prepare for changes ourselves, especially the last great change (*Scott*).

"Their exclamation, 'This Naomi!' expresses the general astonishment at the change which had passed upon her. No doubt the little hamlet had been all aflame with gossip when, ten years before, the rich sheep-master Elimelech had left it, and many pious brows had been shaken over his sin in going to sojourn among the heathen. And no doubt, on Naomi's return, many who would have shared that sin if they could, and many who had committed far worse sins than any of which she had been guilty, once more snook their heads in grave rebuke, and were forward to recognize the judgments of an offended God in the calamities which had befallen her."—*Cox.*

Naomi was formerly a woman of good quality and fashion, of good rank and repute; otherwise her return in poverty had not so generally been taken notice of. Shrubs may be grubbed to the ground, and none miss them; but every one marks the falling of a cedar. Grovelling cottages may be levelled to the earth, and none observe; but every traveller takes notice of the fall of a steeple. Let this comfort those to whom God hath given small possessions. Should He visit them with poverty, and take from them what little they have, yet their grief and shame would be the less; they should not have so many fingers pointed at them, so many eyes staring on them, so many words spoken of them. They might lurk in obscurity. It must be a Naomi, a person of eminence and estate, whose poverty must move a whole city."—*Fuller.*

"If we would truly sympathise with others, we must beware of hastily estimating the manner and degree of their trouble. . . . . Comforters must come as inquirers, not judges; come to bestow consolation, not criticism."—*Lynch.*

"To seek the applause of man is wrong; but to merit it is most desirable. A man of worthless character creates no respect in the minds of others, so that if ill befall him, he finds but little sympathy in the bosom of those around him; whereas a good man under misfortune excites a lively interest in his affairs."—*Simeon.*

"The feelings of men are easily excited for those who have met severe and peculiar afflictions; but in the generality of mankind those feelings soon die away, and, even while exciting, rarely produce any practical effect. 'The whole city was moved' about Naomi, but we are not told that one door was opened to receive her, and we soon find her rejoicing in being allowed to partake of the last and lowest resource of the destitute. Few remember how large a proportion of pure and undefiled religion consists in visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction."—*Macartney.*

"Outward contact never accords with the epoch of inner culture, and therefore, as it cannot further us, must necessarily injure us."—*Goethe.*

"We all suffer from the want of genuine human help and sympathy. But often, to meet our particular case, it is required that those around us possess a higher than the average goodness. We must not curse humanity because we cannot find the man we want."—*Lynch.*

"There is 'salvation in fulness,' and there is 'salvation by fire.' There is the 'abundant entrance' into the kingdom of God, and there is the getting in with something like 'difficulty.' One man may be conducted to his 'joy and crown' through thronging multitudes, amid outstretched hands and reverberating hosannas, and along the great public thoroughfare of the city; while another shall advance with hesitating step; be glad to get an entrance without observation; be met by no congratulating crowds; creep stealthily by some unfrequented street to his undistinguished abode; tremulous with a thankful, though shaded joy, that he is saved at all."—*Binney.*

VERSE 20.

***Theme.*—Spiritual Despondency and Depression.**

"Grief hath changed me,
And careful hours, with Time's deformèd hand,
Hath written strange defeatures in my face."—*Shakespeare.*

"We overstate the ills of life, and take
Imagination, given us to bring down
The choir of singing angels . . .

to rake
The dismal snows instead; flake flowing flake,
To cover all the corn. . . . .
O brothers! let us leave the shame and sin
Of talking vainly, in a plaintive mood,
The holy name of Grief,—holy herein,
That by the grief of one came all our good."—*Mrs. Browning.*

Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, etc.

Ten years have turned Naomi into Mara (*Bp. Hall*). Ten years and departure into the far-off land (cf. Luke xv. 14). This is what sojourning in Moab meant then and always; affliction, barrenness, want, even to those who are least guilty. So Israel had to come out from Egypt, though they found a Goshen there for awhile, "in haste," and as from a land of bondage. Note. *Man goes, but God brings home* (*Lange*). The departure is all our own, the return is His with whom we have to do.

Remark, **I. On the changes incident to human life.** Its sweet and pleasant things become bitter, its fulness emptiness, its prosperous goings out disastrous. Note. (*a*) *This is not by chance, but by the providence of God.* A peculiarity of piety, that it ascribes the issues of all the affairs of life to God (*Lange*). He turns Naomi into Mara, mirth into mourning, sweet into sour, honour into dishonour (*Bernard*). As examples we have Job, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Herod, beyond the memorable instance of the text. Outward glory is but as a fading flower, and as the warm sunshine of a cold wintry day, soon gone, and all the delight thereof (*Bernard*). Note. (*b*) *Every man's estate is in the hands of the Lord to alter as He will.*

Remark, **II. On the meaning and manner of these changes.** (1) *Life means discipline, and therefore pain is a secondary question to that of our perfection.* God denies and takes away, just as the sculptor does with the marble, that he may bring out the ideal form beneath. He finds it sometimes best to cross the likely projects of His dearest children (*Bishop Hall*). "If God have loved thee," says Bengel, "thou canst have no lack of trouble."

Again, (2) *Experience comes in this way:* we grow strong, not only in conflict, but in times when we must bear as well as do. "Thou therefore, my son, *endure* hardship," etc. (2 Tim. ii. 3). The soldier must pass through his baptism of fire, and the Christian his baptism of suffering.

Once more, (3) We never understand life aright until we see in it *two wills in conflict, the human and the Divine.* Our thoughts and purposes at best are not His with whom we have to do. Mark, the choice in life is with us, the issues with Him. There is the exercise of free will on our part, and there are His foreordained purposes. And note, *His purposes will be accomplished, even though He deal bitterly with us.* In all our projects we must expect that God may testify against us as against Naomi. He does so as seeing the end from the beginning, the true meaning of life amid its outward and plausible appearances. Man in his abundance, too, is apt to forget God. Adversity, denial, is the Divine way of calling our thoughts back again to Himself. No doubt God does deal bitterly with men at times. The profoundest love may show itself in this way, as with the parent when he corrects his child; the most far-reaching wisdom, as with the physician when he cures with distasteful remedies. [See also on ver. 13, pp. 50—52.]

Remark, **III. On spiritual depression as accompanying these changes.** Usually, the natural man, even as a beggar, still desires to shine (*Lange*). Not so Naomi. Her humility regards not a glorious name in a dejected state (*Matt. Henry*). She hates this hypocrisy, and since God hath humbled her, desires not to be respected of men (*Bishop Hall*). A poor widow now, though once a noble woman. Call me not Naomi, she says, call me Mara. Note. We have in this

the bitterness of grief, not of impatience; something of that shadow which has fallen at times upon the noblest spirits. We call it *spiritual depression, religious despondency, melancholy, etc.*, and in it the heart does not so much *murmur* against the burden of life as *feel* it. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Enquire (1) *As to some of the causes of this spiritual depression.* Sin in ourselves, wrong-doing of others, peculiar mental and physical conditions, unsolved problems of this our existence. Or, as here, adverse circumstances, and the lowliness of human life (Ps. lxxxviii. 8). Naomi's losses have followed one another like Job's, hence her bitter cry. So Elijah in the hour of depression said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." Note. *With all men there is a cloudy and dark day;* and the world within us generally reflects the world without.

"Many of God's most precious gifts are sad;"

and so far in the world's history the best songs, like the nightingale's, have been sung in the dark.

Again with Naomi, *God Himself seems to be against her, afflicting her.* Her loving heart takes all God's judgments on itself (*Lange*). She is humble, repentant, but also keenly sensitive and alive to the hand above her. A great alleviation of pain to see God in our afflictions [cf. on ver. 13, p. 50, div. I.], but there is a dark side even to this. "*The Lord hath testified against me.*" It is not only God hiding Himself, but God against her, as an advocate pleading, as a witness testifying on the other side. This the bitterest drop in her cup of affliction, which makes her ready to disclaim her very name, and all the past of her history. So, too, in more mysterious sorrow the cry went up, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Note. *God testifies against His own children.* His saints are by no means perfect in love, in faith, in obedience; and He will continue to testify until His own purposes are accomplished in them.

Enquire (2) *As to the Divine meaning in connexion with spiritual depression.* Afflictions (*a*) sent as chastisement, (*b*) allowed as discipline, (*c*) part of a wider problem in the history of the human race.

So with that chastened, humbled, and even sorrowful frame of mind, which accompanies them. Undue sorrow is better than undue security. Where the showers fall most, there the grass is greenest (*Spurgeon*). Just as some islands owe their fertility to the humidity of the atmosphere, the very clouds that darken and the rains that deluge the land, so many Christians owe their richest and divinest experiences to the sorrow which has darkened all their life. No chastening, says the Apostle, for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; *but afterwards* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. xii. 11). And Christ Himself likens the disciples, in the hour of His trial, to a woman in travail (John xvi. 20—22).

"The night is darkest before the morn:
When the pain is sorest, the child is born;
And the day of the Lord is at hand."—*Kingsley.*

Again, just as the capacity for sorrow proves man above the brute, so this very sensitiveness to God's dealings shows the saint superior to the worldling. "Sanctified afflictions," says Dodd, with deep insight into God's dealings with His children, "are spiritual promotions." He treats us as sons (Heb. xii. 7). And so the godly sorrow, our burden to-day, will be our glory to-morrow. Paul felt this when he said, "Our light affliction," etc. (cf. 1 Cor. iv. 11—13; 2 Cor. iv. 16—18, vi. 8—10).

LESSONS. (1) The condition of creatures is soon changed (*Macgowan*) (2) Afflictions may make that which was once our glory seem and sound like irony to us. With Naomi, the very remembrance of her name increases her grief. (3) Those who are truly humbled are not ashamed that the world should think them so. In all forms of good there are more that care to seem than to be (*Bishop Hall*). Many that are debased and impoverished, yet affect to be called

by the empty names and titles of honour they formerly enjoyed (*Matt. Henry*). Not so Naomi. (4) When our condition is brought down, we may and must expect our spirits to be humbled with it. (5) Neither dignity of place, highness of birth, nor fruitfulness of children, may minister comfort to those whom the Lord has humbled (*Topsell*). The hand that smites is the only hand that can heal; and worldly misery is only abated entirely by everlasting felicity. (6) It is not an affliction itself, but an affliction *rightly borne, that does us good* (*Matt. Henry*). "*So, friend, I see that thou hast not yet forgiven God Almighty!*" the rebuke of Ebenezer Adams to a lady of rank, a widow, he was visiting. The reproof produced such an effect, that she immediately had all her trappings of grief destroyed, and went about her necessary business and avocations. So many calamities have been lost upon you if you have not yet learned how to suffer (*Sen. ad Helv.*). Behold us willing to suffer in this life the worst it may please Thee to bring upon us; here lay Thy rod upon us; consume us here, cut us to pieces here, only spare us in eternity (*St. Augustine*). (7) It is no part of religion to harden ourselves against the rod. "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved" (Jer. v. 3), is the charge the prophet brings against Jerusalem; but we nowhere find them condemned for feeling too keenly (*Macartney*).

"She put her mouth in the dust, and spake in a low language, suitable to her present condition; God had afflicted her, and she would carry her sails accordingly. Many are humbled, but not humble; low, but not lowly. These have lost the fruit of their affliction, saith Augustine, and are therefore most miserable. God, saith another, calls no man Benjamin, but those whom their own hearts call Ben-oni in their humility. He salutes them not Naomi, beautiful, who do not humbly feel themselves Mara, bitter."—*Trapp.*

"If all our afflictions come from the Almighty, it is in vain, as well as impious, to contend with Him that smites. Shall the potsherds of the earth strive with their Maker, who has all power to do with them as He pleases? He cannot effectually be opposed, and He can do nothing that is wrong. Weak mortals may injure their fellow-creatures for their own advantage, but what profit can it be to the Almighty that He should oppress the work of His own hands?"—*Lawson.*

We ought not so to lament the comfort we have lost, as to think that all our future days must be spent in bitterness."—*Ibid.*

"Wonder not at David, if he crieth in the anguish of his heart; at Job, if he complaineth in the bitterness of his soul; at Jeremiah, if he lamenteth in the extremity of his grief; for even then they are swallowing of a potion which is bitter unto flesh and blood."—*Fuller.*

"It will always remain a wonder to the majority of men what the agonies of some spirits mean. Questions which scorch the spirit like burning lava, pitiful wailings after light, gaspings of the oppressed soul for fresh air and liberty, they know nothing of. I have met men and women who had been familiar with sorrow in many forms. Fortune had not favoured them—fortune is strangely capricious: in whatever direction the golden veins run in this world, they had never somehow struck into one; the gifts of health had been niggardly doled out to them, and the common enemy death had passed through their homes, and his footsteps had dried up the springs which, amid all the world's weariness, had been so refreshing. These trials they had borne patiently and humbly. But the pain which was almos impossible to bear, the blow which made th soul stagger and reel was this, the ligh went. They were left in mental darkness there was nothing to guide the soul by; pe plexity, uncertainty, bewilderment through out the whole realm of religion."—*Morlai Jones.*

"Now I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended this talk, they drew nigh to a very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain, and they being heedless did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was DESPOND."—*Bunyan.*

"Men spoil their own lives, and then complain that life is evil; they mar and rend the picture, and murmur because its beauty has disappeared; they run the ship upon the rocks, and weep to find her a wreck; they crush the flower with a rude hand, and are disappointed because it withers."—*Thomas Jones.*

"As torrents that are dried up in the heat of summer, when there is most need of them, so all comforts fail in the extremity, that are not derived from the fountain of life."—*Dr Bates.*

"Sorrow is the substance of man's natural life, and it might almost be defined to be his natural capability of the supernatural, nothing has a lasting interest for man which is not in some way connected with sorrow; sorrow is the poetry of a creation which is fallen, of a race which is in exile in a vale of tears."—*F. W. Faber.*

"The cross is always ready, and waits for thee in every place. . . . Why hopest, then to avoid that from which no human being has been exempt? Thou art deceived, wretchedly deceived, if thou expect anything but

tribulation; for this whole mortal life is full of care, and signed on every side with the cross."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

"What is sixty years' pain to eternity? We never think of sorrow in our dreams; wherefore should we in the dream of life?"—*Jean Paul Richter.*

"A few in every age have known the divine art of carrying sorrow and trouble as wonderful food, as an invisible garment that clothed them with strength; as a mysterious joy, so that they suffered gladly, rejoicing in infirmity, and holding up their heads with sacred presages; whenever times were dark and troublous, let the light depart from their eyes, that they might by faith see nobler things than sight could reach."—*Beecher.*

"Darkness shows us worlds of light
We never saw before."—*Moore.*

"The cares and infelicities of life, which are spoken of as 'hindrances to grace,' may be hindrances, but they are the only helps it has in this world. The voice of provocation is the voice of God calling us to the practice of patience.

"A man in his old age is like a sword in a shop window: men that look upon the perfect blade do not imagine the process by which it was completed. Man is a sword. Daily life is the workshop, and God is the artificer; and those cares which beat him upon the anvil, and file his edge, and eat in, acid-like, the inscription upon his hilt,—these are the very things that fashion the man."—*Beecher.*

"No men have need to be so vigilant, so attentive, so listening, so appreciative, as those who are in deep trouble. Sorrow is Mount Sinai. If one will go up and talk with God face to face, he must not fear the voice of thunder, nor the trumpet sounding long and loud."—*Beecher.*

"I have read of a fountain that at noonday is cold, and at midnight it grows warm; so many a precious soul is cold God-ward, and heaven-ward, and holiness-ward, in the day of prosperity, that grows warm God-ward, and heaven-ward, and holiness-ward in the midnight of adversity."—*Brooks.*

"Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New, which carrieth the greater benediction, and the clearer revelation of God's favour"—*Lord Bacon.*

"The good man suffers but to gain,
And every virtue springs from pain;
As aromatic plants bestow
No spicy fragrance while they grow;
But crushed or trodden to the ground,
Diffuse their balmy sweets around."
Goldsmith.

"I see not a step before me as I tread the
days of the year,
But the past is still in God's keeping, the
future His mercy shall clear;
And what looks dark in the distance may
brighten as I draw near.

For perhaps the dreaded future has less
bitterness than I think;
The Lord may sweeten the water before I
stoop to drink,
Or if Marah must be Marah, He will stand
beside its brink.

* * * *

So I go on not knowing. I would not if I
might;
I would rather walk on in the dark with
God, than go alone in the light,
I would rather walk with Him by faith
than walk alone by sight.

My heart shrinks back from trials which
the future may disclose,
Yet I never had a sorrow, but what the
dear Lord chose;
So I send the coming tears back, with the
whispered word, 'He knows.'"

VERSE 21.

Theme.—PAINFUL REMEMBRANCES.

"This is truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."—*Tennyson.*

"Brothers, hush! the Lord Christ's hands
Ev'n now are stretched in blessing o'er the sea and o'er the lands.
Sit not like a mourner, brother! by the grave of that dear past;
Throw the present! 'tis thy servant only when 'tis overcast.
Give battle to the leaguèd world; if thou'rt worthy, truly brave,
Thou shalt make the hardest circumstance a helper and a slave."
Alexander Smith.

I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home empty again: why, then, ? etc.

Sooner or later the time comes in the history of good men when things begin to show themselves as they are. Appearances deceive us no longer. The scales fall from our eyes. Life stands out in its true relationships, and we read, plain as

the handwriting on Babylon's walls, the lessons God would have us learn from the past. We come more completely to ourselves, and that moment, even to the best of men, is one of contrition and regret, and often of painful self-accusation.

Naomi is evidently passing through such a time in this the hour of her return. A penitent feeling pervades her lamentation (*Lange*). She left her people in the day of famine, and now she comes back to them, the famine in her own heart. Life has narrowed itself to a question between herself and God. Her emptiness is of Him, but her going away is all her own. She went out of her own free will, though others led her; and in contrast with this comes the doings of the God of the Israel she left behind. I went because it was my will to go, not God's; now God's judgment has sent me back (*Lange*).

Note. (*a*) *To go out of God's way is to go out of His protection* (*Macgowan*); but (*b*) *to go against His will is to come under the sweep of His chastisements.*

We have here, **I. The true conception of human life.** (1) *God dealing in it personally, individually, with men.* A Scriptural doctrine found from Genesis to Revelation. Pre-eminently a Christian doctrine: "Even the very hairs of your head," etc. More than this, it is a reasonable doctrine. If there be no *special* providence, there is no providence at all; only blind fate, or resistless law. On any other theory which recognises a Deity, we are at the mercy of what is worse than chance—a God who thinks it beneath Him to regard His creatures; or worse still, a God who is chained and overmastered by His own laws.

(2) *Its departures and wanderings our own.* "I went out." If any might hav blamed others, Naomi might. But not so, she blames herself alone. Note. *Self condemnation a constant attendant upon Christian life.* "I went out full." So did the prodigal. People usually get full before they go out from God's way and habitation (*Macgowan*). She went out not for want, but for fear of want (*Bernard, Trapp*). (See on ver. 1, pp. 10—13.) She went out full of family happiness, of joy in her sons, and of hope of a cheerful old age, surrounded by children and children's children; but empty now of all these, without possessions and without hope (*Lange*). What a vivid picture of those who leave the way of God's ordinances and sanctuary privileges! They go out for gain, but they meet with gall and wormwood instead of honey (*Macgowan*). Note. *Our blindness oftentimes carries us into the perils we seek to eschew* (*Bishop Hall*).

(3) *Its better leadings and holier impulses, its repentance and return to God.* "The Lord hath," etc. Just as the planets are brought into their appointed orbits by the central and attractive force of gravitation, so it is between man and God. (See on ver. 7, div. I., p. 35). Mark, (*a*) *that she was brought home again.* Afflictions are not a consuming but a refining fire to the godly (*Secker*). And mark (*b*) *how she was brought back.* By weeping cross, Trapp says quaintly. "Home again empty," says the text. Jehoshaphat's ships were broken; Lot lost all; Josiah came home short (*Trapp*). Note as true always of such returns, that the backslider retraces his steps (1) with many tears and self-reproaches, (2) with conscious emptiness, (3) with total self-renunciation. Naomi renounces even her right to her former name. Why call me Naomi? Why speak a single word to remind me of my former glory? In my losses and in my loneliness, in all that belongs to my life, "the Lord hath testified against me." Men call her Naomi (pleasant, gracious, lovely); but she reads her life in a different fashion, and says, Call me Mara (bitterness). Note. *We fall short in the eyes of God, however we may seem in the eyes of our fellow-men.* Repentance and a change of heart always brings us to see this. The old nature and the old life is no longer Naomi, rather it is Mara to us.

We have here, **II. The true explanation of afflictions.** (1) *Always from God, if not always for punishment.* This one of the great lessons taught in the book of Job. So here. Naomi, not worse, not even so bad, as many around her who had so far escaped calamity. But God has a right to deal severely with the best of His children for their ultimate good. Mark the distinction; He *corrects* His

children, He *punishes* the wicked. The one act looks forward to a future perfectness, the other looks back only upon the past. The one is remedial and continual until the end is accomplished; the other waits and lingers in hope of repentance, but comes at last, swift as lightning, and sudden as the whirlwind. (Cf. Heb. xii. 5—11, with Ps. xxxvii. 9—13, 20, 38.)

(2) *Always having a meaning and a message, though not always in anger.* (See last outline, div. II.) Afflictions are represented here as God's *testimony* against those who have wandered from His ways. "The Lord hath testified," etc. He puts the straight way of His judgments side by side with our crooked ways. As that One who brings all things to pass, He brings our folly to fruition to confound us. He ripens our plans, and lo they are our undoing! It is not that He thwarts us; oftentimes He gives us the desire of our heart, and it is the strongest testimony to our sin. Note. *God not only testifies by word, but by act;* not only in revelation, but in providence. Our life a testimony in its circumstance, etc. God's will is being accomplished in it, as well as our own.

LESSONS. (1) The vanity of earthly possessions. So uncertain is that which we call fulness in the creature, an hour may strip us of all. Like a bladder, so is worldly prosperity; a puff doth make it swell, but a prick doth make it fall again (*Topsell*). (2) It is a sign of true grace when we ascribe the ills which come in life to the hand of God, while we take all the blame to ourselves. What is it but the child recognizing even in chastisement the hand of the Father?

Bernard on this:—

I. That it is a fault, voluntarily for safety of goods, through distrust, to leave God's people, and go to live among idolaters.

II. That there is no certainty in worldly wealth.

III. That oftentimes the ways and means which men take to prevent want, by the same they bring it on them.

IV. That such of God's children as go astray, He will bring home again, but yet with correction.

V. "*Why then call ye me Naomi?*" etc. That the humbled and afflicted take no pleasure to be remembered of their former prosperity by names and titles.

VI. That man's comfort is nothing able to allay the bitterness of God's discomforts on us.

VII. That afflictions are commonly the Lord's witnesses against us for something amiss in us.

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord hath taken away." When He gives, He is under no necessity of securing to us the possession of what He gives. We may soon provoke Him, by our sins, to bereave us of all that He hath given us; but however careful we may be to please Him, we cannot merit the continuance of His favours, and without any special provocation on our part He may have good reasons for impoverishing us, and placing us in conditions quite the reverse of those to which we have been accustomed. And one great reason why God so frequently changes men's prosperous condition into misery is to teach us the folly of trusting to our present enjoyment. 'But this I say, brethren, the time is short. It remaineth,' etc."—*Lawson.*

"It is hard to come down in the world through upright dealing, but harder still to stoop to dishonest dealing in order to keep up in the world. If the loss of temporal gain be the gain of eternal good, then the reverse of fortune is the reverse of misfortune.

"It is difficult to mourn without murmuring. We are permitted to weep and moan under the hand of God, but it is not easy to weep, to sorrow without excess; at once to feel the rod and to kiss it, to adore and to bless a correcting and bereaving God. How noble the spirit, and how pious the language of Job, when he exclaimed, 'The Lord gave,' etc."—*Toller.*

"There are times when we reason thus: the darkness is around us, therefore it will always be dark; the winter has been long and cold, hence summer will never arrive; troubles are come upon us, consequently we are to expect nothing but trouble. Thus does the mind take a melancholy pleasure in tormenting itself. We turn our back to the light, look at our own dark shadow cast upon the ground and then cry out in sorrow that all things are and will be against us."—*Thomas Jones.*

"Afflictions are a testimony against men that they are sinners, but they are not always a testimony that the sufferer is guilty of some particular sins for which God chastiseth him (Job ii. 3).—*Lawson*

"God made men to be blessed. If the cry of broken hearts goes up to heaven, it is not His institution."—*Baldwin Brown.*

"Men think God is destroying them because He is tuning them. The violinist screws up the key till the tense cord sounds the concert pitch; but it is not to break it, but to use it tunefully, that he stretches the string upon the musical rack."—*Beecher.*

"She utters not a breath of accusation against Elimelech, or of excuse of herself. Properly speaking, the fault did lie with her husband and sons. They were the originators of the undertaking that ended so disastrously; but of this she has no memory."—*Lange.*

"She takes the whole blame on herself. She confesses that, in leaving 'the land of promise,' she was walking after her own will, not the will of God. But though she confesses her own sin, she utters no reproach against the beloved dead. 'I went because it was my will to go; and now God has taught me, by all I have suffered and lost, that it was wrong to go. He has justly emptied me of all my possessions, all my hopes.'"—*Cox.*

"It is nearly the same utterances as fell from her lips in parting with Orpah. Grief makes her almost fierce. The name she bears sounds like irony and a reproach."—*Braden.*

"It is good at times to be in distress, for it minds us that we are in exile."—*Thomas à empis.*

"Those trials which come from God are ever without benefit to us, when we receive them worthily, since there is always a rich harvest of spiritual blessings for the afflicted religious heart. If human nature at first shrinks from sorrow, faith and Christian hope soon come to its support; the trial then appears easy to be borne. *Receive it as from God, and its bitterness is past.* . . . Indeed, the peace which is always found in this submission is itself a great blessing, even without any exterior alleviation of sorrow. It is a peace so much the more pure as it is unconnected with the world."—*Fenelon.*

"But the problem of our life is solved in and by Jesus Christ. He has explained its nature, purpose, and ending. Without Him the world is a haunted house, disturbed by strange noises—half-formed apparitions glide through the gloom, and the inhabitants are sore afraid; but possessing His revelation, we know it to be the outer court of the heavenly temple, and we hear already the harmonious voices of the worshippers in the inner sanctuary praising God for their existence. Christ is our refuge from fear."—*Thomas Jones.*

"The martyrdom of an hour is sudden glory, but the martyrdom of a life—there needs something more than human to endure this."—*Spurgeon.*

"Oh ye who suffer, whatsoe'er it is
Hath brought this fellowship with Christ to try the heart,
Know that the angel ministering is God's;
And suffering e'en as doing is the better part.

And ye who, cumbered with much care or pain,
Sleep not, but count the weary hours, and wish for morn;
Lo! from the pentecost of sorrow yours to-day,
The pentecost of joy to-morrow shall be born.

And ye who sorrow for a light that's quenched
For love that gladdened all the morning of life's day;
By all the sacred tears that Jesus wept,
The dead ye mourn are sleeping, and not lost for aye.

Our friend he sleepeth, said the Master once,
So named He man's last hour, when fails the feeble breath.
A sickness to God's glory; through the ages thence
New meaning lurks to us in sorrow, suffering, death."—*B.*

VERSE 22.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Which returned out of the country** [territories or fields] **of Moab.** The description by which Ruth was commonly designated [cf. ii. 6]. (*Speaker's Com.*). As the same expression occurs at chap. iv. 3, in connexion with Naomi, it may be supposed that it became customary to speak of Naomi and Ruth as "the returned from Moab," or, as we should say popularly, "the returned Moabites" (*Lange*). Here the phrase applies to Ruth, as at ii. 6, but in iv. 3 to Naomi (*Keil*). Dr. Cassel translates, "And so Naomi was returned home, and Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her [who accompanied her] *after* [or on] *her departure* from the fields of Moab." And she desired to return with her [that is, with Naomi] with the whole heart; and they came from the land of Moab, etc. (*Syr.*). The Douay, following the Vulgate, trans., "So Naomi came with Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, from the land of her sojourning" [from the land of her pilgrimage (*Wycliffe*)]. Aben Ezra thinks this to be understood of her returning at another time (*Gill*). **In the beginning of barley harvest.** The harvest as a whole commenced with the barley harvest (*Keil*). The beginning of spring, for the barley harvest began immediately after the passover, and that feast was held on the 15th of the month Nisan, which corresponded with our March (*A. Clarke*). They came to Bethlehem on that day in which the children of Israel began to mow the sheaf of barley which was to be waved before the Lord (*Targum*). The firstfruits of the barley harvest were, as we know, presented at the passover.

before which it was not lawful to begin the harvest (*Kitto*). In the next chapter (ver. 23) it is related that Ruth gleaned "until the end of barley and of *wheat harvest.*" This book was therefore appointed by the ancient Hebrew Church to be read in the synagogues at the feast of weeks or Pentecost, when the wheat harvest began (*Wordsworth*) [cf. Intro., p. 1, par. 2]. **They came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest.** Opens the way for the further course of the history (*Keil*). Explains the narrative in the next chapter. Keil questions whether the Bethlehem mentioned in connexion with Ibzan in Judges xii. 8—10 is the Bethlehem of the text, as Josephus affirms.

VERSE 22.

Theme.—THE WANDERER HOME AGAIN.

"I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return, and die at home at last."—*Goldsmith.*

"We leave
Our home in youth—no matter to what end—
Study, or strife, or pleasure, or what not;
And coming back in few short years, we find
All as we left it outside: . . .
But lift that latchet,—all is changed as doom."—*Bailey.*

So Naomi returned . . . . . and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest.

This first chapter of the book of Ruth is in itself a perfect poem, as well as an epitome of human life and a parable of the soul's pilgrimage. The theme is that of "the wanderers." It has its prologue in the famine, and its epilogue in the return. Blow follows blow until the catastrophe is complete in the death of all who left the land of promise, save one. Then out of the dark night of sorrow hope is born and the return begins. Love lights up the picture, a love surpassing the ordinary and usual love of woman, and the chastened spirit bows at last, not to fate, but God. It is a poem complete in itself, rich with contrasting lights and shadows, and as Goethe has well said, "the loveliest thing in the shape of an epic or idyl which has come to us." Penned by inspiration, it has no equal and no second.

See here then, in conclusion, **I. The wanderer home again.** The most friendless of human beings has a country which he admires and extols (*Sydney Smith*). The greatest wanderer, some place dear above all else which he thinks of as *home.* Even the prodigal, sitting in the far country among the swine, remembers he has a "father's house," and turns longingly towards it. So with Naomi. [For the return, see on ver. 6, 7, pp. 32—36, and on ver. 19 and 21.] Note. (*a*) *The home ties the strongest, the home claims the most binding in human life.* True friendship as well as true religion centres there. Bethlehem was Naomi's proper place and the whole scope of the narrative is to show that in leaving it she had gone out of the way of God's providences, as well as of His ordinances. (*b*) *Christian love begins its work at home.* Christian manhood shows its best there, and the circle of genial influence spreads and widens from that centre.

II. Home again in a fortunate way. Led of God; for she recognizes that the Lord had brought her home again (ver. 21). Naomi's extremity was God's opportunity. So with David (1 Sam. xxiii.). The statement of the text made in order to intimate that the help of God did not tarry long (*Lange*). Note. (*a*) *When God leads, it is not ours to linger.* Beware of by-paths and idle goings, keep straight on (*Bernard*). These came from Moab to Bethlehem; they had no idle vagaries that we read of. Old Naomi desired to see her country, and young Ruth was not wantonly disposed, but constantly kept her company (*Bernard*). (*b*) *They arrive safely, whom God conducts.* He neither slumbereth nor sleepeth. He led Israel through the wilderness for forty years, and landed them safely in Canaan at last. So always in lawful journeys, so especially in the heavenward one. Only let us see to it that we are of the same mind as Moses, "If Thy

presence go not with us, carry us not up hence" (Exod. xxxiii. 15), and all our journeyings must come to a prosperous issue.

III. Home again at a fortunate time. At the time of the barley harvest (see Crit. and Exeget. Notes). When there was at least gleaning to yield them sustenance, and the summer before them. In the beginning of the passover, saith the Chaldee Paraphrast, taking the fittest opportunity both for soul and body (*Trapp*). *Here we see the providence of God*, in ordering and disposing the journey of Naomi, to end it in the most convenient time. Had she come before harvest, she would have been straitened for means to maintain herself; if after harvest, Ruth had lost all those occasions which paved the way to her future advancement. God therefore, who ordered her going, concludes her journey in the beginning of harvest (*Fuller*). Note. *There is a fulness and fitness of time for every event* (*Macgowan*). The redemption from Egypt; the coming of Shiloh when the sceptre was departing from Judah; the soul's conversion; deliverance from affliction, etc. (*ibid*). God's time is always the best time.

IMPROVEMENT.—(*a*) When the heart is truly repentant, past error and sin, the humiliating experiences which have left their scars upon our inmost souls, may become to us blessed monitors urging us onward in the path that God has appointed. (*b*) Like the wounded hart, the bruised and troubled spirit turns homeward in its last extremity, if perchance it be only to die there.

"Tender and dear memories cluster around many a spot: none so sacred, so hallowed as this; for once again she is standing in the place consecrated by a thousand memories of the sacred dead. Returns like these ought to be significant of rest and privileges restored, as well as of new consecration to God; and this, although the past has been a barren past of worldly compromise and spiritual deadness."—*B.*

"There is a latter as well as a former rain in spiritual things; covenant mercies to be manifested in our declining years, as well as in the days when the kingdom of heaven was but newly entered. Our youth may have been given in part to folly, the more reason that old age should be consecrated unmistakably to God. And perhaps we, like Naomi, shall best find the Protector of our declining years in the Bethlehems of our youth. . . . Understand the meaning of this place to Naomi. No dreamy haze of mysticism rests upon it, no unreal sanctity. It is a place where the heart writes bitter things against itself, where the icy fountains of the great deep within break up, a place where the past seems a failure, and the future hopeless; and yet for all this it is a place where the winter time of the soul is ending, and the new summer life of prosperity begins to dawn."—*B.*

"The wandering of men from the perfect Home has brought with it degradation and scourging. Their return will be to find a Divine birthright restored in Christ."—*Pulsford.*

"Woe for my vine-clad home,
That it should ever be so dark to me,
With its bright threshold and its whispering tree,
That I should ever come,
Fearing the lonely echo of a tread
Beneath the roof-tree of my glorious dead!"
N. P. Willis.

"Perhaps this world of sorrows presents no sadder picture than that here brought before us—the return of a childless widow to the spot she had left a happy wife and mother."—*Macartney.*

"Thou needest not, then, sit down in weariness and hopelessness, whatever of earlier years thou hast lost, whatever grace thou hast forfeited; though thou hast been in a far country, far away in affections from him who loved thee; and wasting on his creatures,—nay, sacrificing on idol altars, with strange fire, the gifts which God gave thee that thou mightest be precious in His own sight."—*Pusey.*

"Landed property in Palestine is of very little value, except the possessor has the means of cultivating it; and as it was under the Jewish law unalienable, strangers could not purchase it. A landed proprietor might thus be reduced to beggary, and in times of general distress might long remain so. Such seems to have been the case with the family of Elimelech, and they were therefore forced to remain in Moab. Even upon the return of Naomi and Ruth, though the family property was still theirs, they were completely destitute. Their property was valueless, because they did not possess the means of cultivating it. This will serve to explain the peculiar position of Naomi and Ruth on their arrival in Bethlehem."—*Kitto.*

"Many a Swiss has sunk a martyr to his longing after home. The malady is commonly brought on by hearing the celebrated national air of the 'Ranz des Vaches,' sung at an unexpected moment, or when under the influence of dejected feelings. Overcome with the recollections which it awakens, he sheds tears; and is only to be consoled by the prospects of immediately returning to that home, his exile from which he deplores. If unable to accomplish this wish of his heart, he sinks into a profound melancholy, which

not unfrequently terminates in disease and death."—*Percy*.

"It was the custom, and still may be, at the coronation of our sovereigns, that every peer of the realm should come forward, and placing his hand upon the crown, swear that he would maintain due allegiance to it in his own realm and upon his own estate. So true hearts give themselves to God—in that which is truly theirs, at least, He shall reign supreme."—*B*.

CHAPTER II.

THE GLEANER IN THE HARVEST FIELD.

CONTENTS.—*Ruth, in her poverty, is led by seeming chance to glean in the field-portion of Boaz, Naomi's kinsman, and a great man in Bethlehem. Boaz, coming down from Bethlehem, is attracted by her, and makes inquiries concerning her. He afterwards shows her great kindness, and gives his reapers directions to favour her. She returns to Naomi to hear that he is near of kin to them, and to receive the approbation of her mother-in-law. She gleans in the field-portion of Boaz until the end of the harvest, dwelling with Naomi.*

VERSES 1—3.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**And Naomi had a kinsman.** According to Rabinical tradition, which is not well established however, Boaz was a nephew of Elimelech (*Keil*). Lyra saith Elimelech and Salmon—other Hebrews say Elimelech and Naason—were brethren. Some more probably hold that Elimelech was the son of Salmon's brother, and so his son the kinsman of Boaz once removed, for there was one nearer (*Trapp*). Not *the* kinsman who is meant, but *a* kinsman, as there were several (*Wright*). Boaz was only a מֻדָּע (*Lange*); γνωριμος, a friend, a person known (LXX., *Wordsworth*). This not only explains a certain remoteness of Naomi from him, but it makes the piety, which, notwithstanding the distance (manifest also from iii. 12) of the relationship, perform what the narrative goes on to relate, more conspicuously great than it would appear if, according to an unfounded conjecture of Jewish expositors, he were held to be a son of Elimelech's brother (*Lange*). The Hebrew word is not the same as that rendered *kinsman* in ver. 20 and iii. 9—13. Literally, it means only an acquaintance, but it expresses more than we mean by that term. The man was not a very near relative, but one "known" to the family as belonging to it (*Lange*). **A mighty man of wealth** [a valiant hero] (*Lange*). Here it signifies a man of property (*Kiel*). These words are applied to Boaz in no other sense than to Gideon (Judges vi. 12), Jephthah (xi. 1), and others, and have no reference to his wealth and property (*Lange*). The phrase undoubtedly points to his valour and capacity in the field of battle (*Cox*). It is to be understood in the sense of "a leading man; a great man." Hence the Jewish tradition that Boaz is another name for Ibzan, the only judge connected with Bethlehem. He was a strong and able man in Israel in war and in peace (*Lange*). **And his name was Boaz.** Signifies strength (*Fuerst, Wordsworth, Wright*). Son of strength (*Lange, Cox*). Alacrity (*Gesen., Keil*). To be explained by reference to the name of one of the pillars erected by Solomon (*Lange, Wordsworth*). Cf. 1 Kings vii. 21, 2 Chron. iii. 27, in connexion with Solomon's temple. The signification *alacritas* would hardly be applicable to the pillar (*Lange*). The name Boaz found a contrast to that of Ruth's former husband, Mahlon, which signifies *weakness* (*Wordsworth*). The Chaldee reads "mighty in the law." *Boaz*, son of Salmon and Rachab the harlot (Matt. i. 5).

Ver. 2. **And glean ears.** Literally, glean among the ears. Let me gather (Sc., some ears) among those that are left lying in the field by the harvesters (*Lange*). The right to glean was a legal privilege of the poor in Israel (cf. Lev. xiii. 22, xix. 9, and Deut. xxiv. 19). But hard-hearted farmers and reapers threw obstacles in the way, and even forbade the gleaning altogether (*Keil*). Hence Ruth proposed to glean after him who should generously allow it (*ibid*). Gleaning conceded, not as a matter of right, but as a favour (*Kitto*). **Of corn.** Corn is in Syriac the generic word for grain of any kind (*Steele and Terry*). **After him in whose sight I shall find grace.** Whoever he might be. Did not mean Boaz (*A. Clarke*). The owner had a right to nominate the persons who might glean after his reapers (*Steele and Terry*). In other words, the poor applied as Ruth did (ver. 7) for permission to glean. Some think, however, that she did this only as a foreigner.

Ver. 3. **And she went and came.** That is, she went out of the house where she was, and out of the city, and came into the field (*Gill*). According to the Midrash, however (*vide Jarci* and *Alshech, in loco.*), she marked the ways as she went, before she entered into the field, and then came back to the city, that she might not mistake the way (*ibid*). **And gleaned in the field after the reapers.** Still regarded by the rural poor as one of their rights, though the decision has been against them in courts of law. The popular notion probably derived from Jewish customs (see *Kitto*). The law of Moses directed very liberal treatment of the poor at the seasons of harvest and ingathering. The corners of the field were not to be reaped; the

owner was not to glean his own field; and a sheaf accidentally left behind was not to be fetched away, but left for the poor (*Kitto*). As landowners were not subject to money taxes for the support of the poor, this claim was liberally construed by them (*Kitto*), at least by the better-disposed among them. **And her hap was to light.** More literally, "And her lot met her on the field of Boaz" (*Lange*). Literally, her hap happened (*Schaff. in Lange*), her chance chanced to hit upon the field (*Keil. Wordsworth*). **A part of the field belonging unto Boaz.** "The field-portion," *i.e.*, that part of the grain-fields about Bethlehem which belonged to Boaz (*Lange*). The grain-fields, unlike the vineyards, are not separated by any enclosure. The boundary between them is indicated by heaps of small stones, or sometimes by single upright stones, placed at intervals (*Lange*).

CHAPTER II.—VERSE 1.

HOMILIES AND OUTLINES.

***Theme.*—THE CLAIMS OF THE WEAK UPON THE STRONG.**

"Who gain their titles not by birth,
But win them by the lordlier worth
Of noble deeds,—true chivalry,
These men are God's nobility."—*B.*

"Howe'er it be, it seems to me
'Tis only noble to be good:
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."—*Tennyson.*

And Naomi had a kinsman [lit. acquaintance] *of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth* [a valiant hero (*Lange*)], etc.

The second chapter opens up a new act, as it were, in this beautiful and touching drama; poetry of the highest order, and not the less poetry because it is fact; for far more romantic things are recorded in history, than ever yet were created in novel or romance (*Cumming*). Mark, too, that thus early in the narrative, what is the key to the whole story is plainly pointed to, viz., redemption, salvation, help, from one near of kin, one of the same family and blood. No wonder the old Puritans saw a spiritual suggestiveness in the character of Boaz. "My Redeemer liveth" is "my Goel liveth," and the very word is applied to Boaz (chap. iv.). My strength and my Redeemer (Ps. ix. 14), in the Hebrew is my Boaz and my Goel (*Cumming*).

The text suggests as worthy consideration—

I. **The relationship between the rich and the poor.** Every branch of the tree is not a top branch (*Matt. Henry*). Must be and will be subordination, mutual dependence, and mutual responsibility, as long as the world lasts, or as long as the world is what it is. God wills that it should be so. He puts the rich and the poor side by side, and has linked them together a thousand times in this way. Beautiful when life repeats what is seen here, for the narrative goes on to show how Boaz came to respect Ruth and Naomi, first for kindred and then for virtue's sake. Note. (*a*) *A wealthy man may be a good and godly man*, ready to meet the responsibilities which come to him. Riches neither further nor hinder salvation, but as loved and trusted in. Not money, which is "the root of all evil," but the *love* of money. It is rare that religion and riches meet, yet Boaz was both rich and religious (*Macgowan*). Not many rich, etc. (*b*) *Poverty a thing not to be despised in and for itself.* The poor may be virtuous and attractive, as Ruth and Naomi evidently were. Boaz had "a poor relation," a most uncomfortable fact, as many respectable people know (*Braden*). And yet they neither begged of him nor thrust themselves unduly on his notice. They were an example to all the world of that quiet self-respect which feels the claim, and yet waits the opportunity when that claim is to be presented by circumstances and providential leadings rather than by themselves.

Note. (c) *It is not in the outward estate to alter blood and kindred*, or the claims which come from thence. Poor Naomi and rich Boaz were of the same stock after all. Joseph, though governor of Egypt, had poor Jacob for his father, and plain shepherds for his brethren (*Fuller*). Mark the frailty and vanity of worldly dignity. However parents provide for their posterity, these contrasts are common enough in family life. The posterity of the righteous are brought into poverty, that they set not their minds on temporal glory (*Topsell*).

II. The relationship between the strong and the weak. A link here between the two extremes. Boaz, whose very name signifies strength, a hero and a great man, perhaps a judge in Israel; and this poor bankrupt widow, forced to live upon another's gleanings. Naomi could say as does the Psalmist, "Thou hast put my kinsman far from me" (*Lange*). But Boaz had other qualities besides his strength. He shows himself morally brave in every relationship (*Lange*) All the claims which came to him in life are recognized and responded to, (1) as master; (2) as servant of God; (3) as a man of action; (4) as one not insensible to worth, hiding itself under the garb of poverty, he is an example of what is meant by the godly and righteous man. He stooped from his high estate, as Christ Himself humbled Himself to rescue the poor from their lot of ignominy and poverty; and he clothes them with his own dignity. His strength like the Saviour's strength—to compare human things with Divine—is shown in his works. Note. *Jesus is our near kinsman and Goel* (*Macgowan*), a mighty man of wealth in a natural and in a spiritual way (Col. i. 19, ii. 3).

IMPROVEMENT.—Learn from the whole narrative, as shadowed forth here, (1) The nobleness of strength nourishing weakness, true greatness recognizing the claims of those beneath it, where many would pass by and despise. "We that are strong," etc. (Rom. xv. 1). (2) Recognize the claims, which make the whole family of God as one. We are all of the same blood. Go back far enough, and you will find relationship. Remember the words of that noble Roman, received even then with tumultuous applause, "I am a man; nothing that concerns man can be a matter of indifference to me."

"The improvement of the ground is the most natural obtaining of riches; for it is our great mother's blessing, the earth's; but it is slow. And yet, when men of great wealth do stoop to husbandry, it multiplieth riches exceedingly."—*Lord Bacon.*

"It is not the having of wealth, but the having confidence in wealth; not the possessing it, but the relying on it, which makes rich men incapable of the kingdom of heaven: otherwise, wealth well used is a great blessing, enabling the owner to do God more glory, the Church and commonwealth more good."—*Fuller.*

"Naomi, though a poor, contemptible widow, had rich relations whom yet she boasted not of, nor was burdensome to, nor expected anything from, when she returned to Bethlehem in distress. Those that have rich relations, while they themselves are poor, ought to know that it is the wise providence of God that makes the difference (in which we ought to acquiesce), and that to be proud of our relation to such is a great sin, and to trust to is a great folly."—*Matt. Henry.*

"How came it to pass, then, that a man so bold and generous and pious left Naomi unhelped and uncomforted in the time of her penury and grief? We cannot altogether tell. He may have been absent on military service when she returned from the field of Moab, and have only got leave of absence, as soldiers then commonly did, during harvest. He may only just have heard the tale of Naomi's sorrow when he met Ruth in the harvest-field."—*Cox.*

"One would suppose that to the proud heart of man anything would be preferable to beggary; but so inconsistent are its workings, that more are led to beggary by pride than poverty, as people imagine that a certain distinction attaches to dependence on relatives, or even on friends, while they regard the lower kinds of industry as disgraceful. . . . It would be well for all classes to remember that meanness is not humility; it is the miserable resource by which disappointed pride seeks to steal that distinction which has been denied it, and to avoid the humiliating and correcting lessons which Providence sends; it is the crouching to man of those who will not bow to God. In proportion as pure religion enters the soul, this hateful spirit leaves it, and a love of independence takes possession of it,—a love of independence arising not from pride, but from the genuine desire not to encroach on human kindness, not to forget the Divine declaration, "That if any would not work, neither should he eat."—*Macartney.*

"Behold therefore as in a glass the perfect image of temporal felicity, the father a king, the children beggars, the father honourable,

the son not worshipful, the predecessors the chiefest in authority, but the successors the meanest in calling: this made the fathers think that the world was like a sea, here a mighty wave, there a great downfall. Some thought it to be like ice, where a man can never stand sure, but the one will be breaking, or he be sliding; some like to trees whereof the tallest are soonest overturned; but all agree in this, that worldly felicity is miserable vanity; for our present wealth is like a pleasant summer which must needs come to an end, though all the world should strive to the contrary."—*Topsell.*

"Therefore make you friends of the unrighteous mammon, that when you shall have need they may receive you into their everlasting habitations. Distribute liberally, give plentifully, live peaceably, walk humbly; for the wealth of the world doth not always last, neither the crown from generation to generation."—*Topsell.*

"Let this confute such as having gotten a little more thick clay than the rest of their family, the getting of new wealth and honour makes them to lose their old eyes, so that they cannot see and discern their poor kindred afterwards. When Joseph was governor of Egypt, it is said that he knew his brethren, but his brethren knew not him; but now-a-days it happeneth clean contrary. If one of a family be advanced to great honour, it is likely that his kindred will know him, but he oftentimes comes to forget them. Few there be of the noble nature of the Lord Cromwell, who, sitting at dinner with the lords of the council, and chancing to see a poor man afar off which used to sweep the cells and the cloisters, called for the man, and told the lords, 'This man's father hath given me many a good meal, and he shall not lack as long as I live.'"—*Fuller.*

"Who knoweth whether God hath raised thee up, who art the best of thy kindred, to this very intent that thou mightest be the treasure and the storehouse to supply the want of others which are allied unto thee?"—*Fuller.*

"There are multitudes of men like the summer vines, which never grow even liqueous, but stretch out a thousand little hands to grasp the stronger shrubs; and if they cannot reach them they lie dishevelled in the grass, hoof-trodden, and beaten of every storm. . . . As yet the world will not understand that he governs whom love makes serviceable. The strong are few, the weak are many, and God appoints the strong to serve the weak, saying, 'We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproach thee fell on me.'"—*Beecher.*

"A Christianity which will not help those who are struggling from the bottom to the top of society needs another Christ to die for it."—*Ibid.*

"How seldom, friend, a good great man inherits
Honour and wealth, with all his worth and pains!
It seems a story from the world of spirits
When any man obtains that which he merits,
Or any merits that which he obtains.
For shame, my friend! renounce this idle strain!
What wouldst thou have a good great man obtain?
* * * * *
Goodness and greatness are not means, but ends.
Hath he not always treasures, always friends,
The great good man? Three treasures—love and light,
And calm thoughts, equable as infant's breath;
And three fast friends, more sure than day and night—
Himself, his Maker, and the angel Death?"
Coleridge.

"How blessed he
That feels not what affliction greatness yields!
Other than what he is he would not be,
Nor change his state with him that sceptre wields.
Thine, thine is that true life; that is to live
To rest secure, and not rise up to grieve."
Daniel.

VERSE 2.

***Theme.*—HUMBLE TOIL, THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS AN AFTER RECOMPENCE.**

"O woman! in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as is the shade
By the light quivering aspen made;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!"—*Scott.*

"Oh, what makes woman lovely? virtue, faith,
And gentleness in suffering,—an endurance
Through scorn or trial,—these call beauty forth,
Give it the stamp celestial, and admit it
To sisterhood with angels!"—*Brent.*

And Ruth said . . . Let me now go into the fields, and glean. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

This is the first movement of the machine which brought such grand things about. From gleaning she arose to be ancestress to Jesus (*Macgowan*). **This request led to the recompence; proved a step towards her highest preferment.**

Note. (*a*) Great things often arise from very small beginnings. A restless night by Ahasuerus produced that great revolution in favour of the Jews (Esther vi.) (*Macgowan*). (*b*) High buildings are raised upon the lowest foundations (*ibid.*). Christ's Church was to be built upon the truth contained in Peter's confession (Matt. xvi. 16—18). So upon Ruth's fidelity the human nature of our Lord is, as it were, to be engrafted.

It reveals, **I. A truly filial spirit.** Gentle obedience, willing submission to Naomi. Her nativity of Moab; her behaviour that of an Israelite indeed—a true daughter of Abraham, though she springs from Lot (*Lawson*). Mark how her meek and beautiful spirit begins to show itself. She did not go of herself, obstinately and selfishly. She consulted her mother-in-law, and this was even more commendable than if it had been done to her natural parents. Possibly, too, she wished Naomi to enjoy the rest suitable to her time of life. Note. (*a*) *A wise, thoughtful, considerate spirit one of the true signs of grace.* This not always exhibited, especially where the pangs of want are felt. A parent's poverty at times the source of discontent (*Braden*). Many become hard, cold, cynical in reverses. Not so Ruth. (*b*) *These charities of the heart sweeten life* (*Lawson*). We have here a beautiful example of courtesy between children and parents, as in verse 4, between masters and servants.

II. A truly humble spirit. Mark the lowliness of her employment. She will work in the hot sun as a poor gleaner, and never murmur (*Braden*). Some way of earning a livelihood was a necessity. Ruth desirous of an honest though never so simple a calling (*Topsell*). Takes that which is nearest to hand. Will not depend upon Naomi, but would rather that Naomi in her old age should lean upon her. Will not even wait until, perhaps, Naomi's relatives, out of very shame, step in with succour and assistance. No! Like that one in the Gospel, she cannot dig, and to beg she is ashamed. But unlike that one, she is not above using every honest means to maintain herself and assist her mother. Note. *Female feelings are keener than those of men* (*Macgowan*). Contact with the rude, unfeeling world means more to them. Ruth must have shrunk with a woman's sensitiveness from the step. And yet she adapts herself to the new circumstances. She goes out to glean with the poor around her. So Paul: "I have learned in whatsoever state," etc. "I know both how to be abased," etc. (Phil. iv. 11, 12).

III. A truly noble spirit. The best natures show best when most tried, and they are lovelier in poverty than in wealth. Note. (*a*) *Brave toilers have always made the worst drudgery sublime* (*Braden*). Work is not degradation, and only mean spirits think it to be so. Paul laboured with his own hands as a tent maker. Not what I have, but what I do, is my kingdom (*Carlyle*). There is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in work (*ibid*). *However humble, it exalts the man.* Labour is man's necessity . . . is man's glory (*Caleb Morris*), and brings its own reward. Especially so when an affection like Ruth's prompts us to it.

> "Offices of love
> Wrought for a parent lighten duty's labours."—*Sophocles.*

Lessons. (1) Before honour is humility. (2) Great things come to pass by poor and unlikely beginnings (*Bernard*). (3) The way of our abasement may become, in God's providence, the way of our advancement.

Bernard on this:—

I. Honest hearts truly entertaining religion, do not forsake it or the godly for worldly wants.

II. Godly children hold themselves bound to be at the disposing of their parents.

III. Honest minds will stoop to base means, so they be honest, to relieve their wants in their poor estate. The truly religious will not live idle.

IV. Gleaning then, as now, was a lawful means for the poor to get food.
In whose sight I shall find favour.

V. The godly, in using lawful means to live, hope to find favour with one or other for their relief.
And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

VI. Requests are to be granted of parents, unto children, when they be lawful and fit.

VIII. A meek and loving spirit giveth a meek and loving answer.

"What cold entertainment do they find at Bethlehem, even in the Church of God, for whose sake one forsook her country, the other her wealth, and both of them their welfare. . . . Is this the profit of your profession, which promises mountains of security, and pays a multitude of miseries? . . . A man that hath a thousand pounds laid beside him, and layeth it out upon a bargain, whereof he shall receive no profit in many years, but the date expireth and the day of receipt come, receiveth his own and many thousand pounds for his gain. . . . Even so with religion, it is a pearl for which we must sell both living and lands, and yet it is worth both, and many a thousand times more; if thou feel not the profit at first, tarry awhile, thou hast the promise and bond of the Lord of hosts."—*Topsell.*

"For this, then, she had left paternal house and land . . . But the love she cherishes makes everything easy to her. It not only gives utterance to good words, but it carries them into practice. She forgets everything in order now to remember her filial duty to Naomi, and Naomi accepts her offer. Until now she has only silently endured every expression of Ruth's self-sacrifice. She had indeed ceased to dissuade her from going with her, but she had also refrained from encouraging her. . . . The meekness with which she asks permission to encounter toil and misery overcomes in Naomi every other ulterior consideration. Such a request could no longer be silently accepted, nor could it be refused. Naomi has no other reward for Ruth's self-sacrificing disposition, than that she is ready to accept its effort for herself."—*Lange* (condensed).

"What prosperity had concealed, adversity brings to light. Nobleness that we never suspected, with powers that would have remained uncultured and unfruitful, have been manifested. They are like some grand mansion surrounded and hidden in summer time by large full-foliaged trees; the passer-by cannot discern the fine proportions and ornamental sculpture that make it 'a thing of beauty;' but when winter tears away with ruthless hand every leaf, until the trees stand clear and bare, then behold the magnificent handiwork appears in all its glory and perfection."—*Braden.*

"I do not hear Ruth stand upon the terms of her better education or wealthy parentage; but now that God had called her to want, she scorns not to lay her hand upon all homely services, and thinks it no disparagement to find her bread in other men's fields. There is no harder lesson to a generous mind, nor that more beseems it, than either to bear want or to prevent it. Base spirits give themselves over to idleness and misery, and because they are crossed will sullenly perish."—*Bishop Hall.*

"High spirits can more easily starve than stoop; Ruth was none of those. She does not tell her mother. She was never brought up to live upon crumbs. Though she was not brought up to it, she is brought down to it, and is not uneasy at it. Nay, it is her own motion, not her mother's injunction. Humility is one of the brightest ornaments of youth, and one of the best omens. Before Ruth's honour was this humility."—*Matt. Henry.*

Let this teach even those whose veins are washed with generous blood, and arteries quickened with noble spirits, in their prosperity, to furnish, qualify, and accommodate themselves with such gentile (gentle) arts and liberal mysteries as will be neither blemish nor burthen to their birth; that so, if hereafter God shall cast them into poverty, these arts may stand them in some stead towards their maintenance and relief."—*Fuller.*

"There are compensations even in this world, of which we little dream, and God sets one thing, and often a better thing, over against another in human life. Riches fly, but character is developed; we are compelled to work, and out of work spring our truest joys. Our life is paradoxical, but without contradictions; we are made the least, that we may become the greatest, and the way down is, with God as guide, always the road to exaltation."—*Braden.*

"Young persons should be cheerfully willing to bear fatigues and troubles for the sake of their aged parents, that they may enjoy such ease as the infirmities of age require. Let those who are in the vigour of age, if their parents are feeble, remember what their mothers endured for them in infancy or sickness, how they willingly suffered anxiety of mind, the want of sleep, and many fatigues of body, that their beloved offspring might enjoy pleasure, or be relieved from distress.

How selfish are the spirits of those young persons who grudge toil or expense for their parents in that time of life when they can enjoy little pleasure but what arises from beholding the affectionate attachment of their children."—*Lawson.*

"I am told that the Court of Common Pleas, which is not infallible, has decided that nobody has a right to glean. It was hitherto supposed to be a universal right; that prescript had made it law; but one of our courts has decided that it is not law, and that nobody has a right to glean. And therefore we have got what I suppose is thought politically a better substitute—the Poor Law, instead of the ancient usage of gleaning in the fields after the reapers."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"Labour is, and must be, the foundation of our earthly livelihood, must be the price of our natural, our bodily, our animal happiness. Labour in some shape or other is, in fact, the very foundation of everything that is good for man."—*Caleb Morris.*

"Do the duty which lies nearest thee, which thou knowest to be a duty. Thy second duty will already have become clearer. . . . Hence also our whole duty, which is to move, to work, in the right direction."—*Carlyle.*

"As frosts unlock the hard shells of seeds, and help the germ to get free, so trouble developes in men the germs of force, patience, and ingenuity, and in noble natures 'works the peaceable fruits of righteousness.' A gentle schoolmaster it is to those who are 'exercised thereby.' Tears, like rain-drops, have a thousand times fallen to the ground and come up in flowers."—*Beecher.*

VERSE 3.

Theme.—SEEMING CHANCES, REAL PROVIDENCES.

"Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
When our deep plots do pall; and that should teach us
There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."—*Shakespeare.*

"All Nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good.
And spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right."—*Pope.*

And she went and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and her hap was to light, etc.

Inspiration speaks here after our human ways and methods of speech. Christ Himself did so in His wonderful parable of the Good Samaritan. "By chance," He says, "there came" (Luke x. 31). Note. *A revelation from God to man necessarily implies this condescension.* Just as the Word was made flesh, so the Divine thought, when it was revealed to holy men of old, must clothe itself with the limitation and imperfection which belong to speech. How else could we receive it—understand it? Elsewhere, however, the Scriptures teach us there is no such thing as chance. "Not a sparrow falleth," etc. And where men think they appeal to fortune, the hand of God is to be seen. "The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposing of it is of the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 33).

Observe, I. **That by what appear mere accidents, we may alight upon our best blessings** (*Braden*). Wandering at her will, going whithersoever she would, she was still treading in the path of destiny. Possibly she had neither choice nor desire, which could bias either to the right hand or to the left. At best, it was only a question as to where she would be allowed to glean that absorbed the mind (ver. 2, 7). Yet it was one of the critical moments of her life. So with ourselves. How many things have *happened*, about which we were strangely indifferent; yet their issues have proved unspeakably momentous (*Braden*). Note. *Human life itself is made up of little things, of small and seemingly unimportant events, upon which greater things depend.*

"Guard well the boon, 'tis trivial
In seeming only, and shall win
A dower of heaven for faithfulness,
The curse of hell, if there be sin."—*B.*

Observe, II., as following this—

That these seeming chances are real providences. If we could see the end as God does, we should see that every event is for the believer (*McCheyne*). With regard to Ruth, *this was hap or chance;* she knew not the fields of Boaz from those of another. With God it was providence. Outwardly, and as men speak, it was an accident, but mark to what the accident led! It brought her to that part of the field belonging to the man to whom, of all others, it was of the greatest importance she should be introduced. Note. (*a*) *That which we call chance, casualty, accident, "good luck," is included in the all things that work together for good* (Rom. viii. 28). What though it be a catastrophe or a crime!—there may be second causes and the action of human evil, but the great first cause is in all (*Spurgeon*).

Note. (*b*) *Those things which with us* are *accidental, are all the determinations of a holy Providence* (*Macgowan*). Ruth's purpose was to glean, God's purpose was to direct her into the way of meeting with Boaz. So always. In the eye of man, mere chance brought Jacob and Rachel together (Gen. xxix). So with Pharaoh's daughter going to bathe (Exod. ii. 5—10). None the less there was the Divine purpose being accomplished, which had respect to the future of Israel. So with the Syrian arrow drawn at a venture (1 Kings xxii. 34). God directed it. Note. (*c*) *The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps* (Jer. x. 23). We go blindly, not knowing what a day or even an hour may bring forth. All is chance in one sense. We stumble upon the best things that come to us in life. It is all a surprise, and God has intended that it should be so. But then this is only the human side. Look deeper, and there is a plan, a purpose. Life unfolds itself to the wise man more and more as if it were a premeditated thing. There is a fitness, an appropriateness about all that happens, which speaks the Divine direction and control. Note. (*d*) *Providences to the righteous are but the fulfilment of promises.*

Learn, **III. That God does direct and give success to the efforts of the right-minded.** David says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Ps. xxxvii. 23). If so, the way and its issue alike must be well. Who can guide himself aright in this perplexing world? (*Braden*). Ignorance, confusion, the tangled thread of human affairs, everywhere apparent!

> "Mystery enshroudeth ever,
> Unknown shores on either side,
> And for ever through the darkness
> Flows the deep and troubled tide."—*B.*

So men have said as they travel onward down the stream of time. But faith has its answer amid these perplexities of human life,—"This God is our God for ever and ever, and *He will be our guide* even unto death."

Note. (*a*) *That this Divine guidance, however apparent, does not set aside individual responsibility.* The angel hands were laid upon Lot when he left Sodom, but he himself must yield to them—the human will working with the Divine will—if his salvation is to be secured. He might have cast off the angel hands, and perished with his sons-in-law, who mocked alike at the threatened danger and the offered guidance (Gen. xix. 14—16). Note. (*b*) "*I being in the way, the Lord led me*" (Gen. xxiv. 27), *the principle upon which God deals with men.*

So it was with Ruth. Mark (1) *God's blessing met her in the way of humble toil.* Lange gives as a more literal translation, "And her lot met her in the field of Boaz." Her destiny was decided there—humble gleaner as she was, she found favour with the man upon whom everything depended. So always. God's blessing can come to us in the cornfield, or in the workshop, or in the counting house. And He Himself can be with us there. "Not man's manifold labours," says Dr. Pusey, "but his manifold cares, hinder the presence of God. Labour ordained by God, and wrought for and in God, invites God's fuller presence." Note. *A principle in this choice of the humble who are to be exalted* [cf. Luke i. 48—53]. He

who chose a gleaner to be the ancestress of David, of Christ, chose the fisherman, and the tax-gatherer, and the tent maker, to confound the wisdom and the greatness of the world (1 Cor. i. 18—28).

Mark (2) *God's blessing met her in the way of a self-denying as well as a self-appointed duty.* Her reward found her where her love led her. This one of the main lessons of the history, a lesson pointed out by the pen of inspiration itself [cf. ver. 12].

Tyng on this (ver. 2—6) condensed :—

Theme.—THE GLEANER.

God brings His children by ways they know not. The manifestation of His plans gradual. No accident in our lives. How ample was the portion He had provided for Ruth, a kinsman prepared to protect, to sustain, and to exalt her —a mighty man of wealth. But as yet she had no personal knowledge of him —no means of knowing the gracious purposes of God regarding her. So God has prepared an all-sufficient and waiting Saviour for the poor and perishing sinner, a Saviour able to meet his wants, his dangers, his future need. But the perishing one knows nothing of Him. The way in which God is pleased to lead us to Jesus illustrated in the method of Ruth's introduction to her rich kinsman.

I. The first step is to reduce her to the deepest necessity. In great poverty, and with no apparent means of relief, Ruth proposes to glean. The very necessity brought out a proof of her excellency. So God brings the soul to an experience of utter want. Looks round in vain for relief. His conscious necessity urges him to come as a beggar. And it is when he can say, "I am willing to be the lowest of the low, if the Saviour will receive me," that the day of his salvation draws nigh.

II. The next step is to take away all feeling of rebellious pride in this state of want. Sinful pride, a most common attendant on earthly distress—a very different feeling from self-respect. Ruth had great self-respect, and yet she was not ashamed to be poor. Willing to glean—to do anything. So the sinner must be made to feel his deep unworthiness, his complete nothingness, etc.

III. The next step is one of gracious providence to bring her, as it were by accident, to an unexpected introduction to her rich kinsman. God had disposed and prepared her way before her ; and leads her to the very place where He designs to bless her. Her coming seemingly accidental, but far enough from accident in reality. So the gracious providence of God is often manifested in bringing poor, perishing souls under the ministry of the Word ! This the point to which everything else is tending, and to which everything else is subordinate.

IV. The next step in Ruth's history is the peculiar crisis at which she came into the field. The time of a gracious visit from the master, etc.

Bernard on this (condensed) :—

And she went and came and gleaned. She craved leave to go, and when it was granted, she accordingly went. (1) *Honest motions and intentions to well doing are to be put into practice,* else they are worth nothing. Paul had a mind to visit the brethren, and he did so ; the prodigal son had a purpose to return home, etc. If motions be good, it is good to put them into execution, and that speedily . . . . and not to lose the fruit of good thoughts. (2) *Whom necessity moveth, and confidence in God encourageth, they fear no danger.* Trusting in God, and being urged of necessity to use honest means to live, she feared no peril, though in those days, every one did what they listed (Judg. xviii., xxi. 25). When men have faith in God, when the duty of their calling warranteth them, they grow courageous and bold, and put on a resolution without fear.

And her hap was. When things fall out beside a man's purpose, or otherwise than was intended, and whereof a man is ignorant before the thing come to pass, then it is counted hap, or luck, or as the heathen used to speak, fortune. (1) *It is not unlawful to speak according to men thus : It happened, it chanced, it was my*

luck; so that we understand thereby that which happened beyond our purpose and expectation, but yet guided by God's hand and providence . . . . always excepting in clear cases, where the apparent hand of God is seen; for thus offended the Philistines (1 Sam. vi. 6—9). (2) *God doth so govern men's actions, as things fall out beyond expectation, and as they were to be wished.* See it in the success of Abraham's servant sent to fetch a wife for Isaac (Gen. xxiv.); in Elijah coming to the poor widow of Sarepta in a most fit hour, etc. This should make us to rely upon God's providence as Abraham did (Gen. xxiv. 7). (3) *God will prosperously direct the well-minded which use honest means to relieve themselves.*

"She went out, not knowing whither she went; taking either the right hand, or the left, scarcely being able to assign a reason why she preferred the one to the other."—*Toller.*

"The misery or happiness of our life is often derived from accidents that appear quite trivial. Time and chance happeneth to all men, and no man can tell what consequences the slightest accident may leave. Connections, happy or pernicious, riches or poverty, life or death, may be the consequences of a walk or a visit intended for the amusement of a single hour."—*Lawson.*

"As the star (Matt. ii.) guided the wise men to Judea, to Bethlehem, to the inn, to the stable, to the manger; so the rays and beams of God's providence conducted Ruth, that, of all grounds within the compass and confines, within the bounds and borders of Bethlehem, she lighted on the field of Boaz."—*Fuller.*

"We take our steps without thought of consequences, and imagine that we are following out our own arranged designs, when all the while we are unconsciously fulfilling the purposes of a sovereign Providence."—*Braden.*

"How comes the Holy Spirit to use this word—a profane term which deserves to be banished out of the mouths of all Christians? Are not all things ordered by God's immediate providence, without which 'a sparrow lighteth not on the ground'? Is not that sentence most true, 'God stretcheth from end to end strongly, and disposeth all things sweetly: strongly, Lord, for Thee; sweetly, Lord, for me'? So St. Bernard. Or was the providence of God solely confined to His people of Israel, that so Ruth, being a stranger of Moab, must be left to the adventure of hazard? How comes the Holy Spirit to use this word 'hap'?"—*Fuller.*

"Things are said to 'happen,' not in respect of God, but in respect of us; because oftentimes they come to pass, not only without our purpose and forecast, but even against our intentions and determinations. It is lawful therefore in a sober sense to use these expressions, 'It chanced,' or 'It fortuned' (Luke x. 31). Nor can any just exception be taken against those words in the collect, 'Through all changes and chances of this mortal life,' provided always that in our forms of speech we dream not of any heathen chance. It is observed that τυχή is not used in all the works of Homer; but sure St. Austin, in the first of his 'Retractations,' complaineth that he had too often used the word *fortuna*, and therefore, in the pagans' sense thereof, we ought to abstain from it."—*Ibid.*

"Scripture speaks of all things as being what they appear to be: were it otherwise, its language would be incomprehensible to us. We would not talk to a savage of chemical affinities, in endeavouring to explain to him the uses of salt or soap; we would speak of their apparent properties, and thus be enabled to carry his mind with us. Were God to speak to us of things as they are, that is, as He sees them, how utterly unintelligible would such address to us be! Let us mark attentively the course of events connected with, and depending on, this *chance* event—the birth of Obed, and through him of David—the promises made to the man after God's own heart fulfilled by the appearance in that family of God manifest in the flesh; . . . . and let us cast from us as unscriptural and absurd the theology which would teach us that great events are indeed ordered by God, but that smaller matters are beneath His notice, and unworthy of it. While the greatest events are made to spring from minute causes, the Lord of the universe must be recognised alike in the smallest as in the vastest of His works, whether of providence or of creation. 'The very hairs of your head are all numbered.'"—*Macartney.*

"The story describes it as a fortunate incident, a curious coincidence; that is, it speaks in a natural human manner about it, because, when unable to trace the immediate action of a Divine hand, we are inclined to speak of chance rather than law, and of fortune rather than God. But we believe that it was by a supernatural guidance she was led there that day. . . . It was 'her hap, but it was God's will."—*Braden.*

"Things do not *happen*—casualty, accident, chance, are mere words used to conceal our ignorance. Look deep enough, and you will find law, order, and purpose in the most chaotic circumstances; listen attentively, and you will hear the sound of a Divine harmony beneath the discordant and confusing noises of our present existence."—*Thomas Jones.*

"People say, 'How fortunate it is that things have turned out just as they have—that I was prepared for this!' As if God did not arrange the whole! One might as well say, 'How fortunate it is that I have a neck beneath my head, and shoulders under my neck!'"—*Beecher.*

"*Doubt* Providence—and what the better

are you? You have the liability to accident, and nothing to control it, nothing to throw light upon it, nor to which you yourself may fly. You are the creature of chance, driven to and fro as a fallen leaf, and when you cry, there is none greater than you to help you."—*Wardlaw McAll.*

"This circumstance was with Ruth merely accidental, and not the result of choice and contrivance; but it was the effect of the Lord's secret direction, in whose providence great events depend upon apparently trivial incidents."—*Scott.*

"Accidit acciders vel eventus. By mere chance in respect of Ruth, who, being a stranger, knew not whose field it was; but by a sweet providence of God, who led her hither by the hand, as it were, for her present encouragement and future advancement."—*Trapp.*

"Little do we know, when we go forth in the morning, what God means to do with us ere night. There is a providence that attends on us in all our ways, and guides us insensibly to His own ends; that Divine hand leads Ruth blindfold to the field of Boaz."—*Bishop Hall.*

"Blindfolded and alone I stand,
With unknown thresholds on each hand;
The darkness deepens as I grope,
Afraid to fear, afraid to hope:
Yet this one thing I learn to know
Each day more surely as I go,
That doors are open'd, ways are made,
Burdens are lifted, or are laid,
By some great law unseen and still,
Unfathom'd purpose to fulfil
Not as I will."—*Helen Hunt.*

"I do not deny that these things happened in the natural order. I say I am grateful for what happened; and look back at the past not without awe. In great grief and danger, may be, I have had timely rescue. Under great suffering I have met with supreme consolation. When the trial has seemed almost too hard for me, it has ended, and our darkness has been lightened. Ut vivo et valeo—si valeo. I know by whose permission this is, and would you forbid me to be thankful? To be thankful for my life; to be thankful for my children; to be thankful for the daily bread which has been granted to me, and the temptation from which I have been rescued? As I think of the past and its bitter trials, I bow my head in thanks and awe. I wanted succour, and I found it. I fell on evil times, and good friends pitied and helped me."—*Thackeray*

VERSES 4—7.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 4. **And behold Boaz came.** Not only to see the progress of the work, but also to take part in the entertainment provided for his labourers (*Wright*). **The Lord** [*Jehovah*] **be with you.** The first time this emphatic expression occurs in Scripture (*Scott*). Cf. Judges vi. 12. The same salutation as that addressed by the angel to Gideon (*Speaker's Com.*). The salutation one almost universally hears between the peasants in the fields are identical with those used by Boaz and his reapers (*Dr. Porter*). The *Targum* is, "May the word of the Lord be your help."

Ver. 5. **Then said Boaz** [*And Boaz said*] **unto his servant that was set over the reapers** ἀγροχόμος; the land steward (*Josephus*). נער is not only used in its primary significance as a boy, but also in its more general meaning as a servant (*Wright*). **Whose damsel is this?** *τίνος ἡ νεᾶνις ἄυτη* (*LXX.*). Cujus est haec puella (*Vulgate*). What nation is this girl? (*Targum.*) What is the news of this girl? (*Syr.*) What is the state of this maiden? (*Arab.*) It seems that Boaz found her resting in the tent where the reapers took their meals (cf. ver. 7—14).

Ver. 6. **It is the Moabitish maiden.** Or she is a Moabitish maiden, who came back with Naomi, etc. (*Lange*). Thus taken, the answer does not assume that Boaz is acquainted with the return of Naomi. The E.V. may, however, be justified by taking הַשָּׁבָה as a participle (cf. *Ges.* iii. 2, *a*) (*ibid.*) [cf. on i. 22]. Boaz had heard of her, and had been much interested in her history (ver. 11), but he had not seen her before, so that this was their first meeting (*Steele and Terry.*)

Ver. 7. **And she said.** And she has said (asked). Pray I will glean [*i.e.*, pray allow her to glean] (*Keil*). **And gather among the sheaves** [Greek, handfuls]. The Israelites appear generally to have made up their corn into sheaves (*Kitto*), cf. Gen. xxxviii. 7; Lev. xxiii. 10—15; Job xxiv. 10, etc. In the most ancient times, however, the corn was plucked up by the roots, and in Egypt at this day, barley and dourra are so gathered. Wheat as well as barley does not grow half so high as in England (*Russell*). **So she came, and hath continued.** And has come and stays (here) from morning till now (*Keil*). And she has gleaned from morning even to resting (*Syr.*). The LXX. renders it freely: "And she came and stood from morning till evening, and rested not *even* a little in the field." **That she tarried a little in the house.** Thus her sitting in the house is but for a little (*Lange*); *i.e.*, she has been sitting in the house as you see her now, only for a short time (*Wright*). Boaz, it would seem, had remarked Ruth sitting in the cottage or tent in which the reapers were accustomed to rest themselves and to take their meals (*ibid.*). Wordsworth thinks it hardly probable, that she would have entered a tent of the reapers, and translates rather as to her stay in the house, that is little; *i.e.*, she spares herself no time to go home for rest and refreshment. Her

sitting in the house that is little (*Keil*). Evident from this answer, (1) that Boaz did not prohibit any poor person from gleaning in the fields; (2) that Ruth asked permission of the overseer, and availed herself of that permission, with untiring zeal from the first thing in the morning; (3) that her history was well known to the overseer, and also to Boaz, although Boaz sees her now for the first time (*ibid.*).

VERSE 4.

Theme.—THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASTERS AND SERVANTS.

"It is a kind of good deed to say well;
And yet words are not deeds."—*Shakespeare.*

"Large-hearted souls that turn with love
To all beneath and One above;
To heaven they constant bow the knee,
And prove them God's nobility."—*B.*

And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord [Jehovah] *be with you, etc.*

Now that Ruth is in the field, the plans of Divine Providence are not completed until Boaz has been led there. Note. (*a*) *Providence is the execution of the Divine decree, always infallible and well-timed* (*Macgowan*). How opportunely it brought Pharaoh's daughter to the infant Moses; Ahasuerus to have that part of his chronicles read which concerned Mordecai (Esther vi. 1, 2); Pharaoh to dream when Joseph is to be delivered from prison. A similar guidance to be recognized in connexion with the text. [See on ver. 3.] Note. (*b*) *God's thoughts are above ours, and He so orders our actions as we, if we had known, should have wished* (*Bishop Hall*). Looking back, how often do we see that He has not only given us the thing that is best for for us, but brought about events even as we ourselves could have desired.

Remark, **I. On the character of a righteous man as illustrated here.** Boaz seen in the text as (1) *diligent in business*, (2) *fervent in spirit*. Rich but religious, a rare bird (*Trapp*).

Mark *his industry*. Did not sit at home, and leave his affairs to his servants. There is an overseer [a land steward—*Josephus*] but everything is not left to him. Not one of those who are ashamed to be seen in the fields with his labourers. No! he goes to inspect, to oversee, to direct, to look well after his business affairs. *An example* (*a*) *to masters.* "No eye like the master's." If a man would thrive, let him do his business himself (*Toller*). Careful personal superintendence not only necessary, but beneficial—work performed more rapidly—vast waste prevented, etc. (*Braden*). (*b*) *To ministers.* Oportet Episcopum conscionantem mori (*Bishop Jewell*).

Again mark *his benevolence and kindness to a stranger* (ver. 8—16), as well as *the courtesy and piety expressed here.* The salutations are earnest prayers. Like every good man, he carries a devout atmosphere about with him wherever he goes, into the cornfield as well as into the closet. Note. (*a*) *Real goodness will display itself in every relationship of life.* Naaman, although a heathen, appears to have showed kindness to his servant (2 Kings v. 1—3). Our faith barren, unless it make itself seen in the character and the life. If a man cannot be a Christian in the place where he is, he cannot be a Christian anywhere (*Beecher*). Note. (*b*) *Good men will pray for a blessing upon those around them, especially those of their own household.* The Lord be with you! This address, with the response, is one of the earliest examples of family prayer (*Wordsworth*).

Remark, **II. On the right relationship between master and servants, as illustrated here.** They must be very depraved men who are not faithful servants and sincere friends to such masters as Boaz. "Even publicans," says our Lord, "love those who love them" (*Lawson*). Note. *Good masters generally make good servants.* Treat men with kindness and courtesy, and they will return it, as here. The just demeanour of their master, refined by humility, controlled these (*Lange*),

Observe, (1) *The mutual respect and good-will between master and servant* expressed in these salutations. The picture a very beautiful one, the master praying a blessing upon his servants, the servants in return praying a blessing upon their master. Can a pious mind read these godly salutations without wishing for a return of those simple, primitive times? (*Adam Clarke.*) Note. (*a*) *Christians are to bless, and curse not.* Religion requires rather than prohibits these salutations [cf. Matt. x. 12; John xx. 26; Luke i. 28; Ps. cxxix. 7, 8, etc.], so that our greeting be sincere. It is to be neither that of an Absalom (2 Sam. xx. 10) nor a Judas, but free from guile, and without hypocrisy. (*b*) *A sign of an ungenerous nature to be outvied with courtesy* (*Fuller*). Charity hopeth all things, and if they [whom we salute] be not sons of peace, our peace returneth to us (*Trapp*). Those passages, as 2 Kings iv. 29, and Luke x. 4, which the Anabaptists formerly quoted against Christians saluting each other, to be explained by the haste of the messenger, etc. (*Bernard*).

Observe, (2) *The harmony between employer and employed.* The secret of it to be found in the joint dependence upon the Divine providence expressed. "The Lord," etc. Living faith in God is the best bond between master and workman; preventing a wrongful use of power on the one side, and presumptous insubordination on the other (*Lange*). Note. *Only a true Christian can make either the highest type of master or of man.* Until men are inspired by God's love . . . until they have confidence in each other as religious men, there will be neither mutual sincere courtesies, nor any profound trust in each other's dealings (*Braden*).

This happy relationship expressed in the text *useful*, if only *by way of contrast.* Class alienation our country's greatest curse (*Braden*); little of genial unity between employers and employed; the breach between capital and labour seriously widening (*ibid.*). Where is the cure? Laws, however wisely framed, can never altogether amend relationships which depend upon mutual esteem and good-will. The cure must go deeper than the realm of law. Is to be found alone where Christianity promises it, in the regeneration of human nature itself.

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) Let us learn to use (*a*) courteous salutations as expressions of a sincere good-will (*M. Henry*). (*b*) Pious ejaculations, lifting up our hearts to God for His favour (*ibid.*) upon ourselves, our friends, households, servants, etc.

(2) See how grace humbles the heart, teaches men to be sociable—is the very cement of society. It makes mighty men of wealth not above their fellows (*Macgowan*). Among the Moslems, the salutation . . . . a sign of their brotherhood in religion, and *their actual equality before God* (*Kitto*). We may go to the East to learn how the poor may be treated with courtesy, and be continually reminded, in every passing form of speech, of their natural and religious brotherhood (*ibid.*).

"It appears safe to conclude that the inn of Joseph and Mary was the inn of Jeremiah; and if it was the inn of Jeremiah, it was also beyond doubt the house of Chimham, and consequently it was presumably the house which had once been that of David and Ruth.

"Every hint afforded by the Bible narrative as to local fact and local colour helps to prove that the birthplace of David, and that the khan, or residence of Jesse, in which the two men were born, stood here in Bethlehem, on the very ridge now crowned by the Church of the Holy Nativity. . . . As the shape of the ridge, and its relation to Jerusalem imply, the spot on which the house of hospitality would stand must have been a little below the town, at the junction of roads coming up the great valleys . . . on a spot lying below the gates and above the fields; in fact, the very ground on which the inn of Jesus stood, and on which the church and convent of the Grotto stand.

"Here, then, where by all analogies we should seek it, the Bible tells us that the house of Boaz stood on the green slopes some paces below the town, between the gates and the cornfields. Ruth, living in the town with Naomi, had to go down into these fields as the gleaners go down now (iii. 3), the descent from the hill on which the city is built to the fields being sharp."—*Hepworth Dixon's "Holy Land."*

"So a king, in Homer, is represented as among his reapers, with his sceptre in his hand, and cheerful. Pliny relates it, as a saying of the ancients, that the eye of the master is the most fruitful thing in the field; and Aristotle reports, that a Persian being asked what fattened a horse most replied, The

eye of the master; and an African being asked what was the best dung for land, answered, The steps of the master."—*Gill.*

"Say to a Turk according to custom, 'May your morning be propitious!' he replies, 'May you be the pledge of God!' Ask a Turk, 'Is your health good?' he answers, 'Glory be to God!' Salute him, as you pass him rapidly in travelling, he exclaims, 'To God I commend you!' and is answered, 'May God be with you!'"—*Hartley.*

"The pious, affectionate language interchanged between him and his reapers, and which appears to have been familiar to them, shows that there were many godly persons in Israel, notwithstanding national defections; and it beautifully illustrates the genuine effect of true religion in producing affability in superiors, and respect and affection in inferiors, and mutual unaffected goodwill in all. It is lamentably true that such language as this is seldom heard in our fields, while the bounty of Paradise is gathered in, but frequently the reverse; yea, whatever can inflame the passions and corrupt the morals; so that a stranger, who should be occasionally present, would be apt to form a very different opinion of the religion of England, than Ruth did of that of Israel, from the conversation and conduct of Boaz and his reapers."—*Scott.*

"'If a civil word or two will make a man happy,' said a French king, 'he must be wretched indeed who will not give them to him.'"—*Dictionary of Illustrations.*

"Observe, courteous and loving salutations beseem Christians. Indeed, our Saviour (Matt. x.) forbade His disciples to salute any in the way; but His meaning was that they should not lag or delay, whereby to be hindered from the service wherein they were employed. And St. John, in his second Epistle, saith, that to some we must not say 'God speed,' lest we be made 'partakers of their evil deeds;' but that is meant of notorious sinners, which have discovered their impious intents. It is commonly said that the smallpox is not infectious until it be broken out, so that before the time one may safely converse, eat, drink, lie with them; but after the pox is broken out it is very dangerous; so we may safely salute and exchange discourse with the most wicked sinners, whiles yet they smother and conceal their bad designs; but when once they declare and express them, then it is dangerous to have any further familiarity with them."—*Fuller.*

"Piety not only stands with humanity and civil courtesy, but also exacteth and requireth it (Matt. xii.; 1 Pet. iii. 8; Luke x. 5). God hath His ethics, and commandeth good manners as well as good conscience. Affability and courtesy is the way to win others; men's minds are taken with it, as passengers' eyes are with fair flowers in the springtide; whereas a harsh, sullen, sour, churlish conversation is very distasteful to all, galleth the best (witness David, 1 Sam. xxv.), and openeth bad men's mouths to speak evil of religion."—*Trapp.*

"This was a real prayer from the mouth of Boaz. It is too common with men to say 'God be with you,' when God is not in their thoughts. The name of God is profaned when it is used without consideration. It is reported of the great philosopher Boyle, that he never mentioned the name of God without making a visible pause in his discourse. . . . All good things are requested in this prayer, *The Lord be with thee.* God's presence and favour will satisfy our souls, will supply every want, will turn sorrow into joy, and the shadow of death into the morning. But without God's presence and blessing, the richest confluence of sublunary blessing will leave us wretched and miserable, poor and blind and naked."—*Lawson.*

"These salutations are well paraphrased by Dr. A. Clarke:—'May God be with you to preserve you from accidents, and strengthen you to accomplish your work,' 'May God bless thee with the increase of the field, and grace to use His bounty to the glory of the Giver.' They impress us as beautiful indications of the pious and simple courtesy of the ancient Hebrew people. Such salutations, both between equals and superiors and inferiors, are still common in the East, but a Moslem will not thus knowingly hail one of another religion."—*Steele and Terry.*

"Men must strive to understand each other's position, to look upon it with broader sympathies, to learn that the interest of master and servants cannot be separated. For this class alienation is our country's greatest curse, and must prove utterly disastrous to the prosperity of its commerce and the growth of its social well-being."—*Braden.*

"Where a pious and brave spirit like that of Boaz pervades the community, social questions and crises do not arise; for external laws can never restrain the inward cravings of the natural man. But where the landed proprietor, in his relations to his people, is governed by other principles than those of self-interest, and cares also for their moral and religious development; where, further, the labourer understands that an increase in wages is not necessarily an increase of peace and happiness; where, in a word, the consciousness of an omnipresent God regulates the uprightness and care of the one, and the honesty and devotion of the other; there, no artificial solutions of conflicts between capital and labour will be required. Boaz lives in God, and therefore knows what duties of faith and love are obligatory upon him."—*Lange.*

"I think it looks as if Boaz and his servants were really on friendly terms, and had one another's interests at heart; he was pleased to see them cheerful and happy, and they to see him prosperous; he piously wished a blessing upon their labours, and they devoutly returned a benediction upon his substance."—*Fuller.*

"The master of the great household of the world gives us an example of the case, whose eye is in every corner of his large possession. Not civility only, but religion, binds us to

good husbandry. We are all stewards, and what account can we give to our Master, if we never look after our estate? I doubt whether Boaz had been so rich if he had not been so frugal, yet was he not more thrifty than religious. He comes not to his reapers but with a blessing in his mouth, 'The Lord be with you,' as one that knew if he were with them, and not the Lord, his presence could avail nothing. All the business of the family speeds the better for the master's benediction. Those affairs are likely to succeed, that take their beginning at God."—*Bishop Hall.*

VERSES 5—7.

***Theme.*—ATTENTION TO THE STRANGER AT THE GATE.**

"The fragrant sheaves of the wheat
Made the air above them sweet;
Sweeter and more divine
Was the scent of the scattered grain,
That the reaper's hand let fall
To be gathered again
By the hand of the gleaner:
Sweetest, divinest of all,
Was the humble deed of thine,
And the meekness of thy demeanour."—*Longfellow.*

Then said Boaz . . . Whose damsel is this?
And the servant that was set over the reapers answered, etc.
And she said, I pray you [thee] *let me glean, etc.*

A finer picture of rural harvest-scenes is nowhere extant. We hear, as it were, the rustling of the reapers' sickles (*Lange*). The interest, however, here, as always, centres in the human elements of the picture—most of all, in Ruth pursuing her humble and lonely task, a stranger in a strange land. Possibly the poet's words are only too true, where he speaks of

"The sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn."—*Keats*

Rural life not that paradisiacal thing Virgil contrasts so enthusiastically with the luxuriant life of Rome (*Lange*). Even in Israel a gleaner, conspicuous by her foreign garb, may have been in danger of insult (ver. 9). Only when a pious and Godfearing spirit rules in the heart of proprietor and dependants, is it good to live amid the quiet scenes and rewardful toil of the country (*Lange*). Only then "the chaste dwelling preserves virtue [casta pudicitiam servat domus] (*ibid.*). The text gives a fine example of the best aspects of rural life, where religion comes in to soften and refine its usual asperities.

Observe, **I. The prompt attention as well as careful although courteous bearing towards a stranger** on the part of the master. (1) *Prompt attention.* The Hebrew law held a master, in some measure, accountable for the stranger at his gate [cf. Exod. xx.10]. Nehemiah recognized this responsibility (Neh. xiii. 16—22). So does Boaz in the text. He does not wait for information, but asks at once, Whose damsel is this? An example (*a*) *to masters and heads of households*, which followed, will assuredly bring its own reward, as here. "Be not forgetful," says the Apostle, "to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. xiii. 2). (*b*) *To ministers.* One of the complaints of modern worshippers is, that they come and go from the sanctuary unheeded; no one making inquiries concerning them or their welfare; no one doing for years what this fine old Hebrew gentleman did at once, and in a spirit which lifted it above all possibility of being misunderstood. Even Eli, although mistaken, was not indifferent to the stranger in the sanctuary (1 Sam. i. 1—18). Note. "*No man careth for my soul,*" *a terrible inditement, if true, against any Christian church or community.*

(2) *Carefulness.* Boaz, in doing good, evidently would know the persons and recipients; who they are, whence they came, whether they were worthy or not. A modern tendency to be lax on all these, and kindred points, rebuked here. True that God sends His rain upon the just and the unjust, that the wicked are not to be left to perish in times of want; but also true, that the Church has a special duty towards its own [cf. Gal. vi. 10; Luke xxiv. 47, etc.]. Charity is to *begin* at home, as well as to begin with the worthy, though it is not to remain there. Note. *Strict inquiry should be made respecting those damsels who glean in the field of gospel ordinances. Whose are they, God's or Satan's?* (*Macgowan.*)

Observe, **II. The ready and unhesitating answer** on the part of the steward. Mark, (1) *He answers without hesitation;* can give a ready account of those whom he has suffered to glean in his master's fields. Evidently he has performed his duty as overseer diligently and faithfully, as one who may at any moment be called to an account by the master. An example (*a*) *to servants*, (*b*) *to church officers, elders, deacons, ministers, etc.* Note. Church stewards ought to be capable of giving an account of those they suffer to partake of her bounty (*Macgowan*).

(2) *He makes no attempt at concealment.* Had done nothing but what he knew the master would approve. His kindness to the damsel had not made him unfaithful to his master; nor did his faithfulness to his master make him surly to the poor (*Macartney*).

(3) *He is just and accurate in the account he gives.* He neither misrepresents nor overstates,—a model steward. "Faithful in that which is least," in that which simply concerns a poor gleaner, he is likely to be "faithful also in much." A contrast to the unjust steward mentioned by our Lord (Luke xvi.).

(4) *He displays a kindly and considerate spirit.* Little did he think that this damsel was his intended mistress (*Macgowan*). But, like master, like servant. He had caught some touch of the generous and considerate spirit which belonged to Boaz; he knew his master's benignity, and imitated it. Honourable of him, that he at once recommends Ruth by praising her diligence (*Lange*). Note. *The well-disposed will praise virtue wherever they see it.*

Observe, **III. That which made this attention and kindness on the part of master and servant of value** in the case of Ruth. (1) *She was a stranger*, one of an alien race, a Moabitish damsel. Kindness, sympathy, slight attentions of especial value to such. [Example, Mungo Park and the African women.] This gave her, too, a special right to gather the gleanings of the harvest (Lev. xix. 9, 10). Even the law pointed out the stranger as one not to be forgotten and overlooked by the benevolent—how much more then does the gospel! Ruth's position illustrates that of many to-day; just coming into similar relationships with the Church of God. Note. *All are Moabites by birth, who glean in the gospel fields* (*Macgowan*).

(2) *She was a proselyte*—had left all for Naomi and Naomi's God. This evidently procured her favour in Israel, and ought to have done so. Note. *Such deserve the deepest sympathy and the warmest welcome from the Church of Christ.* Only those who have passed through the same, or a kindred ordeal, can understand what it means, this tearing oneself away from old associations and affections, for the sake of a new principle, possibly to be met with coldness and even distrust and prejudice.

(3) *She was humble and modest in her behaviour.* Not merely the natural charm and grace of her presence, not merely her modest and reserved bearing, not merely the fact that she was a foreigner, makes her conspicuous; the narrative reveals other and more sterling qualities: (*a*) *gratitude* (ver. 10), (*b*) *humility.* Did not glean until she had asked leave: "I pray you let me," etc. (ver. 7). Little did she think that this rich field was to become her own. Note. *In all this she is a type of the true convert.* What mean thoughts have such of themselves when they come first to glean in the gospel fields! (*Macgowan.*)

They cannot think they have a right to the handfuls, much less to the sheaves, less still that the field is their own; and least of all, that the unsearchable riches of the owner are theirs (*ibid.*).

(4) *She was diligent and unsparing of herself.* Gleaning not a dignified employment, but she evidently did it thoroughly and heartily. Note. (*a*) *There should be fidelity, heartiness, thoroughness, sincerity, honest truthfulness, in the minutest things* (*Beecher*). [Example, Phidias; see extracts.]

Mark her constancy, too, in industry. Not merely diligent at first, as many, but all day long. *A type of those who are really and truly Christ's.* We are His if we continue in well-doing, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end (Heb. iii. 14). Ruth continued in her labour "from the morning till now," till night, till the end of the harvest (*Fuller*). Oh that we could imitate her constancy in the working out of our salvation! not only to be industrious in the morning, when we first enter into Christianity, but to hold out and to persevere even to the end (*ibid.*).

Again, observe on the other hand, as taught here, *that rest is a necessity* with the most urgent and diligent. Allowed and blessed of heaven (Ps. cxxvii. 2). True Christians, however, feel like Ruth, that they must be up and doing; "*her resting in the house is but for a little*" [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes]. They feel emphatically that to-day is for work; to-morrow, the to-morrow of eternity for rest.

Braden on this (ver. 5—16) condensed:—

Theme.—INTRODUCTION TO A FUTURE WIFE.

Divine Providence led Ruth into that particular harvest-field, and under the same mysterious guidance, Boaz directs his steps thither. Judging from the subsequent history, may we not say, that God designed this meeting in order that the two might become husband and wife? The truth of the proverb (not always applicable, however,) that marriages are made in heaven, illustrated here.

1. Notice here *Boaz's introduction to his future wife.* As he enters the field, he notices a stranger,—his curiosity aroused, little dreaming what consequences would follow. May have been attracted by the beauty of her face, by her industry in the field, or her Moabitish dress. Inquires "Whose damsel is this?" (ver. 5.) The reply shows how well known, and equally appreciated is her behaviour to her mother-in-law. Evidently the universal theme of conversation. Good deeds done modestly need no trumpeter, they are speedily recognised.

(2) Notice *the first conversation between this future husband and wife.* Ruth, absorbed in her work, heard not Boaz speaking to her (ver. 8, 9). Note how sensitive, thoughtful, and delicate his offer. He makes provision that she shall not only be unmolested, but refreshed (ver. 9). Seems a little thing to do, but character is shown more in small than great deeds. The needy often deeply touched by trivial gifts. Ruth deeply moved. "Why have I found grace?" etc. (ver. 10). Has no vanity, no pride; she knows how to receive a gift. Does not regard this generosity as a right, nor accept it with grim sullenness. Evidently Naomi has told the story of her daughter-in-law's fidelity, love, and self-sacrifice. An Israelite, like Boaz, devotedly attached to Bethlehem, appreciates the intensity of affection which could so unreservedly forsake the home of childhood and the associations of youth,—a rare instance of high virtue (ver. 12). Did not, however, let his admiration rest in fine utterances of praise, but gives substantial proof of its sincerity in gifts. His sympathy and benevolence unlike that described by James ii. 15, 16. His kindness exquisitely delicate. He will not offend her sense of independence, so practises a little harmless deception. She shall gather much, and go home fancying her abundance is the result of her own industry. The secret of judicious giving is to help the poor in all possible ways, and not destroy the proud and noble virtue of self-reliance. Indiscriminate charity has produced the pauperism, and lazy beggardom under which society so grievously suffers.

(3) Observe *how Ruth won his affection.* Not by art, stratagem, nor, perhaps, even by her personal beauty. But by her virtues, by her faithful attachment to a poor, distressed mother-in-law, by her steady industry, by her sweet humility, and above all, by her love to the God of Israel. In all this Ruth an example to English maidens. Unfortunately, many seek husbands, if husbands do not seek them—attempt to catch them by meretricious guile and superficial qualities.

(4) Notice *where Ruth won the affection of Boaz.* In the harvest-field. Engaged in common and humble tasks. A hint as to the best place in which to estimate a woman's virtue: not in the ball-room or the music-hall, not in the excitement of a holiday or of the social party, not on the Sunday and in company, but in the quiet routine of her ordinary life. This followed, and there would be fewer mistakes made in matrimonial alliances. Look for a wife, not amongst those who gad about in ostentatious grandeur, nor amongst those whose chief amusement is gossip and flirtation; but seek one whose gentle, unassuming manners, industrious habits, and filial affection, will ensure a happy future, and make a real home. Beware of marrying a slothful woman, or one who speaks against her parents, or one who does not lovingly perform all home duties. Essentially true that a good daughter makes a good wife.

"Thus the Saviour comes to visit His earthly field, and calls the servants to account for their charge. He walks amidst the candlesticks, and holds the stars in His right hand. His ministers watch for souls as they who must give an account. Not the poorest stranger is unnoticed, or forgotten by Him. It is a blessed thought. The Saviour sees. The poor, the lonely, the neglected, in all their needs and sorrows, are marked by His eye. The poor widow's two mites were not forgotten. The Syro-Phœnician was not sent away. Bartimeus was not despised. Lazarus was not rejected. Jesus may be considered as asking His ministers continually, of one and another in their flock, 'Who is that?' And they should be able to reply. He will call them at last to an account for all, and for every soul entrusted to them they must answer."—*Tyng.*

"To create and maintain a familiar and intimate acquaintance with the members of the flock committed to him is a most important instrument of usefulness to a faithful pastor."—*Ibid.*

"The first thing required in stewards is, 'that a man be found faithful' to his employer; but it is also a good property in a steward to be humane towards his lord's servants, and towards all that have any dependence upon him for employment or favours. The man that was set over the reapers of Boaz had already shown such favour to Ruth as it was the part of a steward to do, and by his answer to his master's question concerning her, he was a means of procuring her such favour, as a steward could not confer without permission. Words fitly spoken may do much good, and indicate good sense and good disposition in the speaker."—*Lawson.*

"Let masters, therefore, in choosing the stewards to be set above the rest, take such as are qualified, like Jethro's description of inferior judges (Exod. xviii. 21), 'men of courage, fearing God, dealing truly, hating covetousness.' And however they privilege them to be above the rest of their servants, yet let them make them to know their duty and their distance to their masters, lest that come to pass which Solomon foretelleth (Prov. xxix. 21): 'He that bringeth up his servant delicately in his youth will make him like his son at the last.' Let stewards not be like that unjust one in the Gospel, who made his master's debtors write down fifty measures of wheat, and fourscore measures of oil, when both severally should have been a hundred; but let them carefully discharge their conscience in that office wherein they are placed; whilst inferior servants, that are under their command, must neither grieve nor grudge to obey them, nor envy at their honour. But let this comfort those underlings, that if they be wronged by these stewards, their appeal lies open from them to their master, who, if good, will no doubt redress their grievances."—*Fuller.*

"No sooner is she come into the field, but the reapers are friendly to her. No sooner is Boaz come into the field, but he invites her to more bounty than she could have desired. Now God begins to repay into her bosom, her love and duty to her mother-in-law. Reverence, and loving respect to parents, never yet went away unrecompensed; God will surely raise up friends amongst strangers, to those that have been dutiful at home."—*Bishop Hall.*

"Had a sister Moabitess met her in this employment, and inquired what it was that could urge her to it, she would have answered her as Elger von Hohenstein did his brother, who, finding him away from his castle and its life of ease, engaged in taking care of the poor, exclaimed, 'Alas, my brother! what are you doing? What distress compels you to this?' 'Sir brother mine,' was the answer, 'distress compels me not; but the love of Christ my Lord constrains me.'"—*Lange.*

"Observe, that what happened to Ruth is analogous to what happened to us. For she was a stranger, and had fallen into the

extremest distress; but Boaz, when he saw her, neither despised her poverty, nor contemned the lowliness of her family. So Christ took up the Church, and chose the stranger, who lacked the most necessary possessions, for His bride. But as Ruth would never have attained to such a union had she not previously left her parents and given up people, home, and kindred, so the Church also does not become dear and deserving in the eyes of her Bridegroom until she has left her ancestral (heathen) morals and customs."—*Chrysostom.*

"Even the greatest, in respect of God, is but a gleaner. God, He is the Master of the harvest; all gifts and graces, they are His, in an infinite measure; and every godly man, more or less, gleans from Him. Abraham gleaned a great glean of faith; Moses, of meekness; Joshua, of valour; Samson, of strength; Solomon, of wealth and wisdom; St. Paul, of knowledge and the like. Now, if we would be glad at our hearts that the Lord would give us free leave and liberty for to glean graces out of His harvest, let us not grudge and repine that poor people glean a little grain from our plenty. To conclude: when God hath multiplied our 'five loaves,' that is, when of our little seed He hath given us a great deal of increase, let poor people, like Ruth in the text, be the 'twelve baskets' which may take up the fragments of gleanings which are left."—*Fuller.*

"The plume-like waving of the autumn corn,
By soft winds to a dreamy motion fanned,
Still bring me back thine image, O forlorn,
Yet not forsaken, Ruth! I see thee stand,
Lone 'midst the gladness of the harvest-band,
Lone as a wood-bird on the ocean's foam,
Fallen in its weariness. Thy fatherland
Smiles far away! Yet to thy sense of home,
That finest, purest, which can recognise
Home in affection's glance, for ever true,
Beats thy calm heart; and if thy gentle eyes
Gleam tremulous through tears, 'tis not to rue
Those words immortal in their deep love's tone,
Thy people and thy God shall be mine own."
Mrs. Hemans.

"It is related that when Phidias, the great sculptor, who carved statues for one of the temples in antiquity, was labouring with minute fidelity upon the hair on the back of the head of one of the historic figures, which was to be elevated from the pavement to the very apex of the building, or placed along the frieze, some one expostulated with him, saying, 'Why do you take such great pains with the hair? it is never to be seen.' His simple reply was, 'The gods will see it.' So he laboured thoroughly in the minutest things, not for the eyes of men, but for the eyes of the gods."—*Beecher.*

VERSES 8—12.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 8. **Then said Boaz [and Boaz said], Hearest thou not?** Dost thou hear (*i.e.*, thou hearest, dost thou not? interrogatio, blande affirmat) (*Keil*). Lit. Hast thou not heard? (in the perfect,) the effect of the use of this tense being to mark the permission to glean as irrevocably fixed, not subject to uncertainty or change (*Speakers' Commentary*). **My daughter.** A kind phrase, indicating at the same time Boaz's mature age (*ibid.*). He recognizes the existence of a certain relationship, the benefit of which is due to Ruth (*Lange*). The good report of the overseer (ver. 7) would strengthen any claim he felt Ruth had upon him through Naomi. Spoke with fatherly kindness therefore (*Keil*). **Neither go from hence,** and go not away from here (*Keil*). He has called her to him where he stands by the reapers (*Lange*). **Abide here.** Lit. cleave (*Wordsworth*). κολληθητι (*LXX.*). **Fast by my maidens.** And keep so to my maidens (*Keil*). The gleaner who was allowed to approach nearest the reapers had the best opportunity (*Lange*). Boaz seems to have had women-servants employed. Also perhaps other gleaners in the field, whom he would include among his maidens (*Steele and Terry*). Robinson saw nearly two hundred reapers and gleaners at work in one field (ii. 394). Gleaning was often almost as important as reaping, since the latter was done in a very slovenly manner.

Ver. 9. **Let thine eyes.** Thine eyes (directed) upon the field which they reap, go behind them (*i.e.*, behind the maidens, who probably tied up the sheaves whilst the men-servants cut the corn (*Keil*). The maidens were probably only gleaners, for the verb *they do reap* is in the masculine, *while after* them is in the feminine (*Speakers' Commentary*). In the absence of fences, Ruth might go unlicensed on another's possessions; hence the charge to keep near his maidens (*Steele and Terry*). **Have I not charged the young men?** Such precautions are not out of place at this day. The reapers are gathered from all parts of the country, and largely from the ruder class, and being far from home, throw off all restraint, and give licence to their tongues, if nothing more (*Dr. Thomson*). **That they should not touch** [molest] **thee.** That is, either to hinder, or to injure. **Go unto the vessels.** Doubtless a special indulgence to a gleaner. The harvest-field was often at a distance from springs or wells (*Steele and Terry*).

Ver. 10. **She fell on her face.** With Oriental reverence (*Speakers' Commentary*). [Cf. Gen. xxxiii. 3; 1 Sam. xxv. 23, and 2 Sam. i. 2.] **Bowed herself to the ground.** Towards the earth (*Wright*). **Why have I found grace?** [Cf. 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19, and Luke i. 43.] **A stranger.**

She is so unassuming as to deem this very fact an enhancement of his kindness (*Lange*). Keil trans. "Why have I found favour in thine eyes, that thou regardest me, who am only a stranger?"

Ver. 11. **It hath been fully shown me.** Everything has been told me (*Keil*). Boaz could have derived his knowledge only from narrations proceeding from Naomi (*Lange*). **All that thou hast done.** So Christ knows all concerning those who would be recipients of His favour (ver. 30—36; John i. 48). **And how thou hast left.** Hast therefore done what God commanded Abraham to do (Gen. xii. 1) (*Keil*). **Thy father and thy mother.** [Cf. Matt. x. 37, xix. 29.] One of the plain signs of discipleship. **Unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.** Lit. Which thou knewest not the day before yesterday (*Wright*). Here also is a figure of the Gentile Church coming to Christ; see Ps. xlv. 11—17 (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 12. **The Lord** [Jehovah]. **And a full reward.** A complete reward (*Lange*). And let thy reward be perfect (*Keil*). Recalling Gen. xv. 1 (*Keil*). **Under whose wings.** A figure of speech derived from Deut. xxxii. 11 (*Wordsworth*). Jehovah represented as an eagle there, spreading abroad her wings over her young. Others think the allusion is to the mercy seat overshadowed by the outstretched wings of the cherubim. Cf. also Ps. xci. 4, xxxvi. 8, lvii. 2; and our Saviour's words, Matt. xxiii. 27. In these words we see the genuine piety of a true Israelite (*Keil, Groser*). The Syriac renders this verse *quod sensum*, thus, "May the Lord, the God of Israel, reward thee, and give thee thy reward, to whom thou hast come, that He may protect thee under His wings." Very similarly the Arabic (*Wright*).

VERSES 8, 9.

***Theme.*—CARE FOR THE STRANGER AT THE GATE.**

"With countless sheaves of golden grain
The joyful reapers strew the plain."—*Anon.*

"She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament.
* * * * *
I saw her upon nearer view,
A spirit, yet a woman too;
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet;
A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food."—*Wordsworth.*

Then said Boaz . . . Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not, etc. Have I not charged the young men? etc. And when thou art athirst, etc.

Grace humbles even mighty men of wealth to utter the law of kindness to the poor and needy (*Macgowan*). With Boaz, Naomi's nearness of kin, and Ruth's worth, were both at work to produce this favourable treatment. He recognises the latter (ver. 11, 12) even more plainly than he does the former; for to good men virtue is even more precious than kinship, and goodness will make itself friends always, as here. His good-will shown at once.

(1) *He has a care to be understood.* Hearing is often without taking heed (*Macgowan*). Age and experience may fittingly claim a special attention from the young. Note. *This was a favourite method of appeal on the part of the Great Teacher.* (1) Commands attention. (2) Claims a special and thoughtful consideration for what follows. [Cf. Num. xii. 6; Isa. i. 2; Jer. v. 21; Matt. xxvii. 13, vii. 26; Luke viii. 8, etc.]

(2) *He has a care to put her in her right position as toward himself.* Calls her daughter; a respectful, even affectionate, yet delicate form of salutation, most appropriate under the circumstances. Rich men who have poor relations are not always found saluting them in this way. The same noble yet thoughtful spirit is to be seen in every word he utters.

I. **See the delicacy of his help.** (1) *Does not despise her labour*, respects it, forwards it, helps it,—the sign of a truly noble spirit. He calls her near, and makes her gleaning more productive. So the Saviour, signalized His approach to

His disciples, on a memorable occasion, by a miraculous draught of fishes. He entered into their toils, and increased its returns so much, that the net brake, etc. (Luke v. 6; cf. also John xxi. 6).

(2) *He managed to supply her wants without taking away her sense of independence.* A hint to the benevolent, too often forgotten. Note. *Charity itself may be and is an evil, if it pauperize the poor.* Depend upon it, the best way is to help them to help themselves. The benevolence of Boaz a model in this: (*a*) practical; (*b*) unostentatious. Made the obligation as light as possible, and apparently scarce of a pecuniary nature (*Macartney*).

II. See its genuineness. Is not anxious to get rid of the burden, or to share it with another; rather would take it all upon himself, be it much or little. "Go not to glean in another field . . abide here fast by my maidens." As if he had said, "Depend upon me and mine." A right royal, large-hearted spirit; he has at least enough and to spare for her. Note. (*a*) *It is so he begins to show himself already, her Goel, her kinsman.* Mercy is never miserly. Boaz in all this, his giving and his doing, an illlustration of the way Christ receives (*a*) strangers, (*b*) gleaners in the gospel fields, (*c*) young converts. His provisions are ample—there is enough and to spare; His fields are wide—there is no need to wander from them. Nay, He is even jealous at the thought of our looking elsewhere. Note. (*b*) *In wandering, a snare is more likely to be met with than a blessing* (*Macgowan*).

III. See its thoroughness. He offers not only help, but protection, and provision for all her wants. (1) *He provides for her society.* "Abide fast by my maidens." Hence we gather it is most decent for women to associate with those of their own sex (*Fuller*). The disciples wondered that Christ talked with a woman (John iv. 27), showing hereby that it was not His ordinary course to converse alone with one of another sex (*ibid*).

(2) *He provides for her safety.* "Have I not charged the young men?" etc. Boaz evidently felt that his servants had need of the caution, and that they would stand in awe of his word. Note. (*a*) *Servile natures are most prone to wrong strangers.* (*b*) *It is the part of a good master, not only to do no harm himself, but also to take care that his servants do none* (*Fuller*). This instinct to protect the young and the defenceless from wrong and harm, belongs to every truly noble nature, and the want of it, is a certain sign of baseness and churlishness of spirit. See how it finds its noblest expression in the pathetic words of Christ, "How often would I have gathered," etc. He would that all men should come unto Him and find safety, salvation, life eternal.

(3) *He provides for her refreshment.* "When thou art athirst," etc. Matthew Henry thinks the water was drawn from the famous well of Bethlehem, which was by the gate, the water of which David longed for (2 Sam. xxiii. 16). Wherever it came from, there it was (*a*) already provided; (*b*) freely offered; [cf. Rev. xxii. 17]; (*c*) to be partaken of whenever thirsty [cf. Isa. li. 1]. Note. (*a*) *Thus generosity a faint type of the liberality of Christ* (John iv. 10). (*b*) *A work of mercy and love may be shown in a small matter* (*Bernard*).

"Mothers and nurses are very careful, tenderly to handle infants when they are but newly born. So Ruth: Christ was newly formed in her, a young convert, a fresh proselyte; and therefore Boaz useth her with all kindness, both in words and works: 'Hearest thou, my daughter?'"—*Fuller.*

"Christ knows the heart of a 'stranger'—a stranger to the work of grace, yet a seeker after it—and He bids such stay by Him, among His people, and in His pastures: 'Go not to glean,' etc. He shows not the fulness of His love all at once, lest the trembling soul should be overpowered; but by His gentleness He attracts her love, showing more of the kindness of His heart in acts for her than by any personal expressions of tenderness: 'Have I not charged?' etc. Christ forgets not the sensitiveness of the newborn spirit, vigorous faith shall not boast itself against budding hope, neither shall the strength of manhood urge beyond its power the feebleness of childhood; rather growing experience shall lend a helping hand to new-born desires; and freely as we have received, we must freely give."—*The Believer Filled with Christ's Strength.*

"You have with you, and around you, many

who are striving to walk in the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life. Their light shines before you; their daily walk encourages and animates you. *Keep fast by them.* You have a faithful and simple ministry of the gospel. You have a pure and blessed form of public worship. Every benefit and advantage for you is there. You have the simple and appropriate ordinances of the Lord's house. Jesus has promised to meet you there. *It will be good for you to be found in no other field."—Tyng.*

"According to a proverb of the fathers, benevolence is one of the pillars upon which the world rests. 'The world,' said they, 'is sustained by virtue of three things—the law, Divine worship, and active benevolence.' . . . To do a person a favour is to act beneficently towards him, without any hope or desire of return, and may be practised in two cases—to oblige a person to whom we are not under obligation, and to accommodate or oblige a person, with more trouble to ourselves and more gain to him than he deserves. The mercy which is mentioned in the Bible is that which is given freely and without desert upon the part of one to whom it is granted; for instance, the benevolence of God is called mercy, because we are in debt to God, and He owes us nothing."—*Talmud.*

"Rabbi Jochanan has said that it is as pleasing in God's sight if we are kind and hospitable to strangers, as if we rise up early to study His law; because the former is in fact putting His law into practice."—*Ibid.*

"The pilgrim and the stranger, who through the day
Holds over the desert his trackless way,
Where the terrible sands no shade have known,
No sound of life save the camel's moan,
Hears at last, through the mercy of Allah to all,
From his tent-door, at evening, the Bedouin's call:
'Whoever thou art, whose need is great,
In the name of God, the Compassionate
And Merciful One, for thee I wait!'

For gifts in His name, of food and rest,
The tents of Islam of God are blest.
Thou who hast faith in the Christ above,
Shall the Koran teach thee the Law of Love?
O Christian! open thy heart and door—
Cry, east and west, to the wandering poor,
'Whoever thou art, whose need is great,
In the name of Christ, the Compassionate
And Merciful One, for thee I wait!'"
Whittier.

"In this wonderful universe around us, when the full play of life is seen, it is all a giving, the ocean to the clouds, and the clouds to the earth, and the earth to the rivers, and the rivers to the ocean back again; the sun sends its radiant beams and benign influences among the stars, and the planets reflect them around, each in his lesser sphere; the ground yields its sustenance to the trees, and the trees their fruit and foliage to man; the flowers send their perfumes abroad to the winds of heaven, nor is there a cessation of these sweet interchanges until that moment when activity ceases, and the stagnation of decay begins. The penurious spirit, the spirit which has but to withhold, is an anomaly, a blot in the whole realm of nature. Nothing is made for itself, and it is a sign of death rather than life when the creature begins to circumscribe its influences, and ceases or refuses to give."—*B.*

"Nature says it is 'good,' but grace says it is '*better* to give.' Nature knows something of that lavishness which bestows, because it must bestow, which feels and knows that withholding is to poverty; but grace teaches a higher thing, that 'giving to the poor is lending to the Lord.'"—*B.*

"One day a philosopher inquired of Rabbi Akiba, 'If your God loves the poor, why does He not support them?' 'God allows the poor to be with us ever,' responded Akiba, 'that the opportunities for doing good may never fail.'"—*Talmud.*

"I have noticed in travelling, that when one with a face wrinkled and worn walks into the car, there is not a seat to spare for her; and I have noticed that if one comes in who is young and blooming, of radiant eye and most comely face, there is not one in the car who has not a seat for her. Beauty wins its way. And if it be so in the outward life, which is but a mere shadow of the inward, how much more is it so, in the inward! And nothing is more beautiful, than duty performed under adverse circumstances."—*Beecher.*

"He [Boaz] begged she would keep to his grounds during the harvest, and not, in the hope of bettering herself on the one hand, or in the fear of presuming on the other, remove to the lands of any other person. And it will be observed how, in the absence of enclosures, he gives her the means of knowing his grounds. by telling her to adhere to the company in which she already finds herself, that of his own labourers, among whom she might rely upon being perfectly safe. We gather that the persons employed in the field were men-servants, women-servants, and day-labourers, the women seemingly being chiefly employed, in ministering to the wants of the men engaged in active toil, and in performing some of the lighter labours. One of the most important provisions of the harvest field was water, often necessarily brought from some distance, and placed so as to be kept cool."—*Kitto.*

"Had he been actuated by the spirit of modern sentimentality, he would probably have been ashamed of her. He would have offered her a piece of money, and sent her away, that it might not become known that this Moabitish beggar is his relative. He would at all events, not have allowed her to go on gleaning. But according to the ancient delicate and religious view, he cannot act thus. Nothing has been asked of him; consequently he has no right to wound the self-respect of others. The privilege of gleaning belongs of right to

the widow and the stranger. It is not well that she needs it; but needing it, he cannot hinder her from using it. Even while he admits her relationship, he can only support her in the right, and enlarge its advantages. And this is what he does Ruth had modestly, gleaned at a distance from the reapers and binders. He calls her nearer, and says, 'Go not to glean in another field.' In these words he acknowledges the first degree of the interest to which his relationship binds him."—*Lange.*

"Young men, in any station of life, are often, by their rudeness or licentiousness, the terror of modest young women; but Boaz would allow of no indecency in words or conversation amongst his servants. A good man will not only refrain from doing or speaking evil, but will restrain all that depend on him from licentious or rude behaviour. Paul will have none to be admitted to the office of elders in the church, who do not rule well their own houses. Not that it is a duty incumbent on elders only, to keep their families in due subjection, but because elders must be exemplary in everything worthy of praise. We are all accountable for those evils which it was in our power to have prevented.—*Lawson.*

"'Tis a little thing
To give a cup of water; yet its draught
Of cool refreshment, drained by fevered lips,
May give a shock of pleasure to the frame
More exquisite than when nectarian juices
Renew the life of joy in happiest hours."
Talfourd.

"The Rabbis particularly insist that we are not to confine the exercise of charity to our own people, for the law of Moses inculcates kindness and hospitality towards the stranger within our gates."—*Talmud.*

VERSE 10.

***Theme.*—THE LOWLY ATTITUDE OF A GRATEFUL HEART.**

"When gratitude o'erflows the swelling heart,
And breathes in free and uncorrupted praise
For benefits received, propitious Heaven
Takes such acknowledgment as fragrant incense,
And doubles all its blessings."—*Lillo.*

Then she fell on her face. . . . Why have I found grace in thine eyes . . . seeing I am a stranger?

Outward courtesies should be done in humility of heart, not out of mere compliment or affectation, or an apish imitation of others. Our finest feelings, like the flowers, open and display themselves almost insensibly and unconsciously. If Boaz proves himself the ideal of a true gentleman, Ruth displays no less delicacy and refinement of feeling throughout the whole interview.

Observe, **I. What deep and touching humility is expressed here.** Modesty, unostentatious unassuming worth and humility, are always becoming in the young—more especially so when they are recipients of favours, as here. She cast down her eyes, not looking impudently upon him; she bowed to the ground (*Bernard*), wondering at his great kindness, though it was but permission to glean and to drink water out of the vessels (ver. 9). Neither regarded this as her right, nor an insult to her independence.

Again, **II. What affectionate gratitude is here.** How thankfully doth Ruth take these small favours from Boaz! Perhaps some rich jewel in Moab would not have been so welcome (*Bishop Hall*). Her words were few and to the point, a rare grace in man or woman. Note. (*a*) *Gratitude in the recipient is as beautiful as generosity in the benefactor.* It requires as much grace to receive a favour becomingly, as to bestow one. (*b*) *The humble are always disposed to be thankful.* They think everything better than they deserve.

We have a rebuke here. (1) To such as receive favours, and will not acknowledge them, like the nine lepers (Luke xvii. 18). (2) To such as scornfully refuse favours, and will not be beholden to others. Note. (*c*) *Ingratitude is a soul-sin, a stoppage to all favours* (*Bernard*).

Again, **III. What confessions of unworthiness are here.** Humble souls

wonder at kindnesses, however small, rather than make light of them and disparage the givers; look into themselves and their own unworthiness, rather than remember anything that is of worth in them, or might win them attention. *So with Ruth.* Her mind is fixed upon that which might have hindered, viz., the fact that she is a stranger, rather than upon anything else. *So with the pardoned sinner.* He feels himself the object of such grace and boundless mercy, that his own unworthiness and guilt are more apparent to him than ever (*Tyng*).

Lastly, **IV. What consciousness of need is here.** She knows what she is, a "stranger," but does not attempt to disguise the fact, and all that it means, either from herself or Boaz. A perilous test this, for nothing but goodness in a man will make him kind to strangers (cf. Matt. v. 43—46). Note. *Her very frankness is an appeal to his better nature* for a continuance of his succour and protection. So humble souls cast themselves always at the feet of Christ. They disguise nothing, they feel that they deserve nothing.

Notice that two things were in her favour, and would naturally tend to lead Boaz to listen to her appeal. (1) His own mother, Rahab, was once a stranger to Israel's hope. (2) The children of Israel had themselves been strangers, and were required to remember this (Deut. x. 19). Ruth, however, very properly looks upon her position as enhancing this kindness. *So with man's low estate* and the lovingkindness of God as displayed in the gift of Christ (Luke i. 48). Man's salvation must ever be a wonder to man, a source of never-ending gratitude and adoration. "*Why have I found grace in Thine eyes, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of me?*" the language of every regenerate heart (cf. Ezek. xvi.; John xv. 16).

LESSONS. (1) "He that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Notice. That this was a presage of her better estate. Those which shall receive great blessings are ever thankful for little (*Bishop Hall*). (2) If poor souls be so thankful to us for a handful, or a sheaf, how should we be affected to our God, for whole fields-full, for full barns, full garners!

"He that has nature in him must be grateful;
'Tis the Creator's primary great law,
That links the chain of beings to each other,
Joining the greater to the lesser nature,
Tying the weak and strong, the poor and powerful."
Madan.

"In her humility, Ruth, who had done so much for Naomi, and made so many sacrifices, expects no grace or help from others. Even the slight kindness of Boaz overwhelms her with gratitude. She flings herself at his feet, and pours out her thanks for the kindly notice he has taken of an alien and a stranger."—*Cox.*

"The Scripture often noteth this civil gesture and comely behaviour as worthy imitation. . . . What difference [is there] between this which is done to men and that which is done to God Almighty? Surely, in respect of the outward act, no difference is there at all, but of the mind, which doth conceive of God herein as God, and so this outward humiliation becometh divine adoration; and of man, but as man, worthy of reverence and honour for his place, his age, and gifts; and so the reverence and worship done him is only civil."—*Bernard.*

"Civil honour may and must be given to all in authority, according to the usual gestures of the country. Now such bowing was the custom of the Eastern people (Gen. xxxiii. 3). As for Mordecai's instance, it makes not against this, he being either immediately warranted by God, or else he refused to bow to Haman as being an Amalekite, betwixt which cursed brood and the Israelites the Lord commanded an eternal enmity."—*Fuller.*

"It is a beautiful thing to see persons in reduced circumstances really humbling themselves to their situation, and receiving kindness as it is intended. It is sad to witness the sullen contempt, the haughty dissatisfaction with which every benefit is received by such persons, when their hearts are not softened by grace. It is more blessed to give than to receive, and far, far easier to give in a right spirit than to receive aright. It is most difficult to find the correct medium between a proud rejection of needful relief and an indolent, self-indulgent dependence; between a haughty ingratitude of manner, if not of mind, and degrading sycophancy; but all things are possible to him that believeth; and he who has treasure and a name in heaven will know how to give to the things of earth their due value; and, governed by the will of God rather than by the ebullitions of pride and selfishness, will tread the narrow way."—*Macartney.*

"It may be clearly seen here, that only such as can exercise love understand how to receive it. No one is humbler than he who truly gives from love; of that Ruth is a proof; and for that reason humility never

shows itself more beautiful than when love receives. Ruth had made the greatest sacrifices, although no one had a right to expect them from her, and is withal so unassuming as not to look for anything from others. Most people in her place would have made the first favour shown them the occasion for saying, that in truth they were not at all used to such work. Their thanks would have been combined with complaints and accusing insinuations about the distress in which they found themselves, although they had exchanged the people and god of Moab for those of Israel. Ruth's love did not spring from selfishness, and hence did not give birth to any proud self-consciousness."—*Lange.*

"Oh, then, if Ruth interpreted it such a kindness that Boaz took notice of her, being a stranger, how great is the love of God to us, who loved us in Christ when we were 'strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.' As the never-failing foundation of the earth is firmly fastened, for ever fleeting, yet settled on no other substance than its own ballasted weight; so God's love was founded on neither cause nor condition in the creature, but issued only out of His own free favour. So that in this respect we may all say unto God what Ruth doth unto Boaz in the text, 'Why have we found favour in Thine eyes, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of us, seeing we are but strangers?'"—*Fuller.*

"Here shines forth her humility, modesty, and many other graces: she was, as Gualther saith of the Lady Jane Grey, 'Pietatis, prudentiæ, et modestiæ delicium.' Hence she found so much favour, for true goodness is very lovely, οττι χαλον φιλον εστι . . . . 'Non sum dignus. Domine, quem diligas,' saith Augustine. Every saint may say with admiration, as he did in John xiv. 22, 'Lord, how is it that Thou hast manifested Thyself to us, and not to the world?'"—*Trapp.*

"Receiving, unless we keep a watch upon our hearts, tends to nurture the meaner and the baser self, the churl spirit within us, which is ever stretching out its greedy hand for gain; but giving belongs to that larger life, which was ours when man was made in the image of his God, 'for it is God that giveth liberally, and upbraideth not.'"—*B.*

VERSE 11

Theme.—THE SECOND GRACIOUS APPROVAL.

"Kindness in woman, not her beauteous looks,
Shall win my love."—*Shakespeare.*

"Think not the good,
The gentle deeds of mercy thou hast done,
Shall die forgotten all: the poor, the pris'ner,
The fatherless, the friendless, and the widow,
Who daily own the bounty of thine hand,
Shall cry to Heaven, and pull a blessing on thee."—*Rowe.*

And Boaz answered, *It hath been fully showed me all that thou hast done . . . . and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother . . . . and art come, etc.*

Never was there given to man such a manual for elegance and delicacy in his social relations as the Bible gives (*Tyng*). Many of the Old Testament saints models in this respect.

"He is gentle that doth gentle deeds."—*Chaucer.*

Boaz an instance of politeness growing out of real sympathy and benevolence. We have in his words condescension without haughtiness, commendation without assumption, familiarity without coarseness, delicacy without pretence. Note. (*a*) *Defect in manners is usually the defect of fine perceptions* (*Emerson*). (*b*) *Refinement of heart springs only from faith* (*Lange*). It is the natural outgrowth of a disposition permeated with the humility of the gospel of truth (*ibid.*).

Observe, **I. We can never live a truly noble life without its being known sooner or later.** Fame follows virtue as the shadow does the body (*Trapp*). Well-doing not only deserves praise, but brings favour. Beauty may be defaced, strength may decay, but virtue must always be lovely to those who themselves are virtuous. They seek it, appreciate it, love it wherever it is to be found. So Ruth, and even Orpah, with that which they saw in Naomi (i. 10), and now Boaz with that which he sees in Ruth,

"He whose mind
Is virtuous, is alone of noble kind;
Though poor in fortune, of celestial race."—*Dryden.*

Ruth's virtues shine conspicuous (*a*) in her good deeds to Naomi and the dead (see on i. ver. 8, 9, p. 39); (*b*) in that which she denied herself; (*c*) in her choice of Israel and Israel's God [i. 14—17, pp. 60—70].

Notice. (1) *She did no more than she apprehended to be her duty*—no more than satisfied her own conscience. Hence her surprise. "Why have I found grace?" (ver. 10.) So with the Psalmist. "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" etc. A common attribute of noble spirits displayed here. They do not see the dignity of the life they lead. It seems insignificant, even commonplace. What could be more insignificant than a gleaner's history? Still conscience reigns; there is loyalty to duty, to convictions, to God; and it is this that will elevate and ennoble the meanest life.

(2) *She thought herself unknown and perhaps neglected.* This gracious stranger appears to be perfectly familiar with her whole history. So our fidelity may be secret: He with whom we have to do brings our secret things to light. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid that shall not be known"—a promise often and partially fulfilled in this world, certainly and completely in the next. *It hath been fully showed me.* Note. God's revealing a full one, when His purposes are ripe.

II. We can never do good to others without its bringing a due and appropriate reward. Naomi must have spoken and told all. How, indeed, could she keep silent? Note. *Virtue shall not want trumpeters* (*Bernard*). Even the very stones would have cried out, when Goodness incarnate stood among men, and the hour of His triumph had come (Luke xix. 40), rather than that He had been without the praise which was His due. A story like Ruth's sure to touch a cord of sympathy somewhere or other. Who can tell where or how? Note. *The ways in which reward is to come, mysterious, but certain—unexpected, but how often nearer than we could have imagined!* Ruth begins to reap now for all her past fidelity. Faithful in that which is least, she is to be rewarded with that which seemed to be much.

III. We can never really come to trust in God, and be disappointed either of recognition or recompence. This at the root of all else, the moral of the whole history. Ruth had honoured God, now she finds God begin to honour her. Little did she expect it! Had not, could not have had, the remotest idea of temporal reward. Naomi's words were too plain. [See on i. 11—13, pp. 46—48.]

So with all those in the position pathetically described by Mynster, the Danish bishop: "I know that I am among the *called*, and I muse night and day, in watching and praying, that I may be also among the *chosen*." So with Abraham leaving his fatherland, like Ruth, for God. So with Moses leaving the court of Pharaoh to be with God's people in affliction. So with the apostles, who became aliens for Christ's sake. So with true converts and proselytes in all ages; they come out, leaving all, not knowing whither they go.

Notice, then, as encouraging and always true of such. God gives to them (1) reception; (2) recognition; (3) recompence. (1) *He receives such;* not a single instance of one ever having been rejected. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Even sin cannot hinder, if we are persuaded; for it is said of Him to whom we come, "This man receiveth sinners." (2) *He recognizes such;* knows them as His own (John x. 3, 14), and causes them to be known as His. "His Church is to be as a city set upon a hill" (Matt. v. 14). His people are to be "as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign" (Zech. ix. 16). Said that "by faith the elders *obtained a good report;*" and Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says, "In every place your faith Godward *is spread abroad*" (1 Thess. i. 8). (3) *He recompenses such.* (See next outline.)

LESSONS.—(1) Well-doing provides favour to the poor, though strangers, at the hands of the virtuous (*Bernard*). (2) Let the rich in Christ learn where the first

claim upon their charity must always lie, viz., to the poor who are of the "household of faith." (3) Let the poor labour for grace and godliness (*Bernard*), that they may deserve help when they need it.

"Always say a kind word if you can, if only that it may come in, perhaps, with singular opportuneness, entering some mournful man's darkened room like a beautiful firefly, whose happy circumvolutions he cannot but watch, forgetting his many troubles."—*Helps.*

"Did it ever strike you that goodness is not merely a beautiful thing, but *the* beautiful thing,—by far the most beautiful thing in the whole world? So that nothing is to be compared for value with goodness; that riches, honour, power, pleasure, learning, the whole world and all in it, are not worth having in comparison with being good; and the utterly best thing for a man is to be good, even though he were never to be rewarded for it."—*Kingsley.*

"A beautiful form is better than a beautiful face; a beautiful behaviour is better than a beautiful form: it gives a higher pleasure than statues or pictures; it is the finest of the fine arts."—*Emerson.*

"As might have been expected, the generous heart of Boaz opens all the wider as he listens to her thanks, and learns how unassuming she is, how grateful even for the easy kindness he has shown her. He knows who she is and what she has done. And the piety as well as the generosity of the man comes out in his reply: 'You have left all,' he says, 'in your love for Naomi,—father, mother, and the land of your nativity. The Lord recompense you for this good deed,' etc., etc. Obviously, Boaz had the history of his great ancestor in his mind. Like Ruth, Abraham had left all, and gone out into a strange country. And to him God had said, 'I am thy great reward.' May the blessing of faithful Abraham come on faithful Ruth; this is the wish and prayer of Boaz. He speaks not as a Hebrew landowner to a Moabitish vagabond and beggar, but rather as a Hebrew judge and prophet,—as a prophet who knew that even the stranger who works righteousness and shows kindness is acceptable to God."—*Cox.*

"Nothing can be meaner than flattery addressed either to the rich or poor, but it may frequently be proper to praise those who deserve to be praised. Our Lord praises His disciples when He tells them that they were the men who had continued with Him in His temptations. Paul often commends the Christians to whom he wrote his epistles, although he never failed to remind them that they were indebted to the grace of God for all that was worthy of praise in their conduct or temper. Boaz commended Ruth, not to inspire her with vanity, but to animate her resolution, to comfort her dejected spirit, and to encourage her to use those freedoms which he wished her to use with himself and with other Israelites."—*Lawson.*

"Let this encourage men in their virtuous proceedings, knowing that their worthy deeds shall not be buried in obscurity, but shall find tongues in their lively colours to express them. Absalom, having no children, and desirous to perpetuate his name, erected 'a pillar in the king's dale,' and the same 'is called Absalom's pillar unto this day.' But the most compendious way for men to consecrate their memories to eternity is to erect a pillar of virtuous deeds, which shall ever remain, even when the most lasting monument in the world shall be consumed, as not able to satisfy the ravenous appetite of all-consuming time. And to put the worst, grant the envious men with a cloud of calumnies should eclipse the beams of virtuous memories from shining in the world, yet this may be their comfort, that God that 'sees in secret' will 'reward them openly.'"—*Fuller.*

"The merit which Boaz imputes to Ruth is of a twofold nature. Induced by affection, she has left the highest possessions of life. She was no orphan; she was not homeless; she had what she needed; but left all, and that for something unknown, the value of which she was not able to estimate. 'Thou camest,' he says, 'to a people which yesterday, and the day before yesterday (formerly), thou didst not know.' How? had she not known her family, Naomi, and her own husband, who were of Israel? But this family lived in Moab, where Israel's law was not in force. The national usages and institutions which had been impressed upon Israel by Israel's God she did not know; and notwithstanding this she had said, 'Thy people is my people, and thy God my God.'"—*Lange.*

"Many who are connected by affinity think that no more duties remain to be performed when the bond of connection is broken by the death of that husband or wife on whom the relation depended. Naomi and Ruth were of a different spirit. Naomi never could forget Ruth's kindness to her son. Ruth testified her regard to the memory of her deceased husband by her attentions to his mother. She not only did 'good and not evil' to her husband 'all the days of her life,' but she did all the good she could to him when he was dead, by performing those services to his mother which he would gladly have performed if he had been still alive. The apostle John testified his affection to his departed Lord by taking His mother to his own house and treating her as a mother. There are kindnesses due to the dead as well as to the living, and in these a generous spirit will be careful not to fail."—*Lawson.*

"Rouse to some work of high and holy love,
And thou an angel's happiness shalt know,—
Shalt bless the earth while in the world above;
The good begun by thee shall onward flow
In many a branching stream, and wider grow;
The seed that in these few and fleeting hours
Thy hands unsparing and unwearied sowed,
Shall deck thy grave with amaranthine flowers,
And yield thee fruits divine in heaven's immortal bowers." *Wilcox*

VERSE 12.

Theme.—THE RECOMPENCE OF REWARD.

"The soul that works and lives throughout all time
Embrace you in the happy bonds of love."—*Goethe.*

"'Tis Thine alone to calm the pious breast
With silent confidence and holy rest;
From Thee, great God! we spring—to Thee we tend,
Path, Motive, Guide, Original, and End."—*Johnson.*

The Lord [Jehovah] ***recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee.***

Naomi in her poverty had blessed Ruth (i. 8, 9), now Boaz takes up the same strain. Must be something good in those whom poor and rich alike join to praise. Note. (*a*) *The craving of the human heart for the approval of others not necessarily wrong in itself.* It is the undue craving, etc. Unexpected, unsought in the present instance, and therefore all the sweeter. When we have the prayers and good wishes of the righteous, heaven itself is touched; and when we win their approval and blessing, it is as though the benediction of God rested upon us (Ps. xxxvii. 22). Note. *There is a sense in which every believer may be a priest and prophet to those around him* [cf. on i. 8, 9, p. 39].

Remark, I. **On the Divine recompence as expected and looked for by the righteous.** "I know it shall be well with them that fear God;" the language of every truly believing heart. Much that seems against this; but faith looks through the darkness, and beyond the shadows; knows that there is a power that works for righteousness at the centre of all things, and that every deed of love is sure to meet with its due acknowledgment, and cannot pass unregarded of God (Matt. x. 41—43). Note. It is only our little side of the world which is in the shadow at night time, the whole universe else is filled with light.

Mark, (1) then, *That there is a recompence of reward* [Gen. xv. 1; Ps. xix. 11]. God is no respecter of persons. In every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted (Acts x. 34, 35). Such have the promise of this life and of that which is to come. Note, *Our doings stand linked in Scripture with our reward.* Not that they earn the recompence, but that they regulate, they measure, they foreshadow that which is to be given as only God can give [Matt. vii. 2, xxv. 21, 23].

Mark, (2) *That the godly earnestly desire this recompence of reward.* (*a*) *For themselves.* They look forward, as the hireling, to the end of the day, when rest begins, and every man shall receive, etc. (Matt. xx. 1—16). Not that they look forward merely with the hireling's spirit. No! but reward means with them, life completed, holiness manifested, nearness to Christ. Therefore they have a desire, like Paul (Phil. i. 23; 2 Tim. vi. 8). (*b*) *For others,* as here. They see the righteous in times of trial and poverty, as Boaz saw Ruth. They feel how inadequate is any reward they themselves may bestow. And where they fall short, they turn to God: "The Lord recompense," etc. Note. *Boaz did something to bring about this recompence himself*—a hint to such as are lavish in good wishes, lax in corresponding deeds.

Remark, II. then, **On the Divine recompence as prayed for by the righteous.** (1) *These prayers for the recompence of reward may have a personal aspect,* as here. There are some deeds that men can repay; others God Himself only can recompense. Ruth's heroism and self-denial, a type of that which is sustained "as seeing things that are invisible;" which looks for a reward not manifested as yet. Note. (*a*) *Boaz prays for God's recompence, not man's;* a full reward, abundant as His love; so that she shall miss nothing, but recover all (*Lange*). But mark, he prays for this only in the measure of her worth and her work. His prayer has respect to what he has seen and heard, even while he is calling upon the Unseen

for a blessing beyond the power of man to bestow—a characteristic of all true prayer. There is nothing wild, nothing random, nothing extravagant, in the good wishes and supplications of the righteous. But again note, (*b*) that *God's reward is always a full reward.* Oh! the sure and bountiful payments of the Almighty! Whoever came under His wing in vain? Whoever lost by trusting Him? Whoever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and did not at last rejoice in the change? (*Bishop Hall.*)

(2) *These prayers for the recompence of reward may have a wider aspect.* There is a mysterious connection between prayer and Christ's own recompence upon earth. He is to see of the travail of His soul, but this only as the Church waits upon God in prayer. For this He will be enquired of by the house of Israel (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). The righteous prosper as prayer prevails, the kingdom of heaven spreads as men have power with God. Hence the Church is always to be a praying Church; and when her arms are weary, as with Moses (Exod. xvii. 11, 12), the enemy prevails, and the Divine recompence lingers. Wrong, confusion, evil, seem to have the best of it. It is an age in which the spirits of the martyred ones are represented as crying out, "How long, O Lord?" (Rev. vi. 16.)

Remark, **III. On the Divine recompence as certain to the righteous.** Dionysius is said to have promised a great reward to some musicians who played before him. When they came for it, he told them it was theirs already. They possessed it, in their very hope and expectations of it. A truth taught in this, but not the whole truth. Righteousness is good in and for itself, and brings its present reward in the glorious hope it inspires. But this is not all. God does not disappoint His children. There is something more awaiting us, something hereafter.

Notice then that God's reward comes (1) *Sometimes in temporal gifts and blessings, as here; always in the approval of conscience.* The Mosaic economy recognized both these, but laid a stress upon the former; while the Christian dispensation makes the spiritual, the inner reward, the great thing. (2) *Sometimes in the recognition and approval of good men, as here; always in the recognition and approval of God.* A craving for the former becomes Pharisaism; and therefore the latter is rather to be the distinguishing sign of Christian discipleship [cf. Matt. vi. 1—6, 16—18]. (3) *Sometimes in the spiritual growth and changes which accompany right doing, as here; always in the after reward of eternity.* No doubt that right actions draw us nearer to God, bring peace and quietness of heart now, incline us to become recipients of His mercy, who alone can save. Every deed of righteousness is an acknowledgment of the law which He would bind upon men, and so is a turning to Him and His; not unreward here, not unreward in itself, but to be more fully recompensed hereafter. Note. (*a*) *The workman is not fully paid until his work is done* (Matt. xx. 8); and (*b*) *That all earthly rewards are partial and unsatisfactory* (Luke xiv. 14). It is heaven that is to compensate for the inequalities in the Divine recompence here. As the end approaches, the reward will become more and more apparent (Ps. xxxvii. 4—6, 22—37).

"We find in the Scriptures three sorts of blessings among men. The first is the blessing of a simple wish, which is the most common. Men, naturally limited and feeble, have scarcely anything to bestow but good wishes; they can hardly give anything but their promises, of which, for the most part, they are not very sparing. Their blessings in this particular consist of prayers, which they mutually offer, that the Almighty will deign to preserve—to fill with grace, with joy, and happiness—the persons whom they bless. . . . The second kind are paternal blessings, which include, besides the wish, an act of approbation and authority. Fathers, then, represent in some sense the Deity. Thus almost all the blessings of the patriarchs were prophetical, because in effect the Spirit of God inspired them. . . . The third kind are blessings of command, which are given with authority, by a power received from God to bless in His name and in His stead. Thus Moses blessed the people in the character of their leader and mediator. Melchizedec, both a king and a priest, blessed Abraham, and in his person all the patriarchs. Jesus Christ, the King of peace and righteousness, blessed His apostles, and in their persons the whole Church."—*Superville.*

"The kindness I show thee is little in com-

parison of thy desert; God alone can give thee a *full reward* for thy kindness to thy husband and mother-in-law, and He will do it because thou art come to trust under His wing."—*A. Clarke.*

"Boaz does not discourse as one would speak to a Moabitish beggar. Having heard who she is, he looks upon her with eyes full of joy over her pious actions. He speaks to her as a priest and prophet. And since he spake from the enthusiasm of piety, and she was deserving, his words found fulfilment. She received a reward that was not only full, but which completed and wholly filled her; all of which is implied in the [Heb.] words."—*Lange.*

"When we begin to feel ourselves lag in Christianity, let us spur on our affections with the meditation of that 'full reward' which we shall in due time receive; with our Saviour, let us 'look to the joys which are set before us;' and with Moses, let us have 'an eye to the recompence of reward;' yet so that, though we look at this reward, yet also we must look through it and beyond it. This meditation of the reward is a good place for our souls to bait at, but a bad place for our souls to lodge in. We must mount our minds higher—namely, to aim at the glory of God, at which all our actions must be directed, though there were no reward propounded unto them."—*Fuller.*

"Plutarch tells of a complaint which came from the Islands of the Blessed because improper persons were sent there by the judges in the earthly courts. It was found that titled and noble persons went before the judges with their friends, who solemnly swore that they deserved to be sent to the Islands of the Blessed when they deserved the contrary. It was then decreed by eternal doom that no judgment should be passed till after death, and then only by spirits who could discern the qualities of those whom they judged."—*Dictionary of Illustrations.*

"There are great rewards like jewelled crowns; there are little rewards like diamond dust; the great deed of love shall receive its great reward, and the little deed shall receive its measure too; and so it shall be found hereafter that nothing was forgotten."—*Power.*

"Reward and recompence unto our good works are not due unto us for any worth of our own, but merely from God's free favour and gracious promise. For to make a thing truly meritorious of a reward, it is required, first, that the thing meriting be our own, and not another's. Now our best works are none of ours, but God's Spirit in us. Secondly, it is requisite that we be not bound of duty to do it. Now we are bound to do all the good deeds which we do, and still remain but 'unprofitable servants.' Thirdly, there must be a proportion between the thing meriting and the reward merited. Now there is no proportion between our stained and imperfect works (for such are our best), and that infinite weight of glory wherewith God will reward us. It remains, therefore, that no reward is given us for own inherent worth, but merely for God's free favour, who crowns His own works in us."—*Fuller.*

"Longing for heaven, if there be no yearning and endeavour for present pureness of life and inward peace, . . . can be but an eager, sanguine lust—never a solemn, inspiring hope."—*Lynch.*

"He who sacrifices a whole offering shall be rewarded for a whole offering; he who offers a burnt-offering shall have the reward of a burnt-offering; but he who offers humility to God and man shall receive as great a reward as though he had offered all the sacrifices in the world."—*Talmud.*

"There is an invariable connection between the outpouring of spiritual influence and the ascent of prayer, and the latter is the antecedent of the former; and we believe, verily, that there never was an instance yet, in the history of the Christian Church, signalized by the revival and extension of true religion, which was not preceded by another period of humiliation and anxious and agonizing prayer. . . . At the sixty-second chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah, you read, 'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace'—*that is, in prayer*—'until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth; and the Gentiles shall see Thy righteousness, and all kings Thy glory.' Then God speaks in the sixth verse: 'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night'—*that is, in prayer.* 'Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence'—*that is, in prayer;* 'and give Him no rest till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' 'Give Him no rest'—*that is, in prayer.* Shake off the lethargy which has oppressed you, enter into the holiest of all, bring before it the blood of propitiation, and stand before the Shekinah with unwearied and importunate *prayer.*"—*Parsons.*

VERSE 12.

Theme.—THE WINGS OF THE ALMIGHTY.

"The while He sits whose name is Love,
And waits, as Noah did the dove,
To see if she would fly to him.

"He waits for us, while, houseless things,
We beat about with bruised wings

On the dark floods and water-springs,
The ruin'd world, the desolated sea:
With open windows from the prime,
All night, all day, He waits sublime,
Until the fulness of the time
Decreed from His eternity."—*Jean Ingelow.*

Under whose wings thou art come to trust.

In all ages and nations conversion is essentially the same; irreligion or false religion is exchanged for the spiritual worship of the true God (*Scott*). The alien in birth, or in heart and life, comes to take shelter under the wings of the Almighty. The hour of repentance and conversion is the hour of this turning and taking shelter, whenever and wherever it may be. Note. *We are all aliens by birth.* Humanity left the Ark of shelter ages ago, and has been wandering about like the poor fluttering dove (Gen. viii. 9) ever since.

You will notice—

I. That the Divine willingness to receive men is assumed here. And this, although they are aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and children of the sinful race of Moab. So with ourselves. There are times when we must have help or perish; there are dangers from which none but God can save us. Note. *We seek wisely only when we seek Godward, as here.* The wings under which Ruth had come to trust, (1) *swift*, (2) *broad*, (3) *strong*, (4) *gentle* (*Talmage*). She had come to that One who had revealed Himself to Israel, as a personal God, tender, sympathetic, mighty to save. It is so with all true proselytes. They come not merely to Israel, but to Israel's God; not merely to the Church, but to Him who is Head of the Church. Note. *The two aspects of the Divine character brought together here.* God the Refuge is also God the Rewarder. So Christ (Heb. xii. 2) is the author and finisher of faith, One strengthening and supporting, and yet "holding forth the crown of life."

Observe, then, that when the sinner seeks pardon, or the soul seeks help, (1) *It is here*, in God. He has undertaken to protect, to save such [cf. Isa. xliii. 25, lv. 6, 7; John iii. 16, 17]. (2) *It is ready and waiting.* The wings outspread from the foundations of the earth. Outside is danger, inside is protection; outside is wandering, inside is rest; outside is destruction, inside is salvation. Note. *The grace that comes too late is no grace at all.* What you and I want is a God now (*Talmage*).

II. That the human readiness to seek God is looked upon as necessary. Ruth had *come*, etc. Blessed truth! for that opened the way to all the rest of her history. Man's great sin always is that *he will not come.* More, Boaz takes it for granted that she had faith; for he that cometh to God must believe, etc. (*Bernard*).

Men come to God (1) *To trust.* Where else can man find a fitting sphere for faith but Godward? (2) To find shelter (Ps. xci.). (3) To find deliverance. (4) To find rest and reward.

R. Macbeth on this:—

Theme.—THE SHELTERING WING.

We have here one of those grand and suggestive *figures of speech* with which the Old Testament Scriptures abound, and by which those Scriptures become, to the "scribe well instructed," an inexhaustible mine of "things new and old," "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

The figure—suggested perhaps in the first instance by the divinely prescribed symbolism of the cherubim overshadowing with their wings the mercy-seat—is of frequent occurrence, with richly beautiful variations of aspect, especially in the earlier books of Scripture and in the Psalms [cf. Exod. xix. 4; Deut. xxxii. 11, 12; Ps. xvii. 8, xxxvi. 7, lvii. 1, lxi. 4, lxiii. 7, xci. 4]. By this image we are taught to think of God—

I. As a beneficent sheltering power, to whom the spirit of man, wounded, wearied, baffled by the ills of life, turns and flees for refuge and rest (Ps. xlvi. 1). But this primary conception by no means exhausts the significance of the figure. It suggests—

II. The paternal relationship of God to His people, and the benign constancy and carefulness with which He fulfils the obligations of that relationship. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest," etc. (Deut. xxxii. 11, 12). This implies (1) Nurture, (2) culture, (3) development, (4) guidance.

It suggests further—

III. The beauty, grace, and tenderness of the Divine action towards man. We naturally ascribe these qualities in a special degree to the feathered tribes. And the inspired writer takes this natural conception of ours, and fills it with an inspired thought of God. Just as elsewhere it is said, "He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" etc.; so here we would say, He that taught the dove to soften the nest for her young with the feathers from her own breast, shall He not deal tenderly, graciously, even to self-sacrificing acts of love, with those whom He regards as His own offspring? (1) He covers them with His feathers (Ps. xci. 4); (2) He keeps them as the apple of His eye (Ps. xvii. 8), etc. We have here, not the mere negations of the agnostic, but the God of Israel revealing Himself to the hearts of men; not the vague sentiment of the Pantheist, but the living, personal God, entering into human relationships with human spirits; "Immanuel, God with us." Not the mere "fate," or "law" of either ancient or modern paganism, but the loving Friend who knows His friends, and is known of them (Prov. xviii. 24). In short, we have here a foreshadowing, "as men were able to bear it," of the final manifestation of the fulness of the Godhead in Him who said, "How often would I have gathered you," etc.

E. Price on this:—

Theme.—THE HABIT OF HOLY COMMUNION.

In this benediction we see—

I. A clear definition of the happiness the soul desires.
- *It* would feel it is under Jehovah's protection, like a bird under the wing of its mother.
- *It* would find repose in communion with Him, confiding unsuspectingly in His favour.

II. The act of the soul itself that would enjoy the blessing.
- It must put itself under the Divine protection.
- God always works through our willinghood.

III. The law illustrated by the facts under consideration.
- The holier the life, the deeper is to be the enjoyments of the soul.
- In this sense, the fellowship a *Ruth* has with her God is the reward of grace.

"The living God was exhibited to the faith of His ancient people, as the God who dwelt between the cherubims that spread their wings over the mercy-seat, the throne of His grace. It was perhaps in allusion to this symbol of God's residence amongst His people, that those who sought protection from Him were said to trust under the shadow of His wings. 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. His feathers shall cover thee; under His wings shalt thou trust; His faithfulness shall be thy shield and buckler.'"—*Lawson.*

"This life is but a sort of outward stage, on which we act for a time, and which is only sufficient and only intended to answer the purpose of trying whether we will serve God or no."—*Dr. Newman.*

"How inexcusable are we, if we do not make the Lord our refuge, when we were born in a land blessed with the knowledge of Him, baptized in His name, and trained up to know and serve Him! If a Moabitess came to trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel, how shameful was it in Israelites not to know and trust the God by whose name they were called!"—*Lawson.*

"Truly this poor stranger is like some poor, helpless, fluttering bird exposed to wild storms and unfriendly influences; she needs shelter and fostering, and God will cover and nurture

her beneath His protecting wing—wing that ensures perfect safety, but brings no darkness. Ah! it is a grand belief this man has in the 'God of Israel.' It is no cold speculation about a distant incomprehensible Deity, a Being of icy mountainous magnificence, a Being who is but a combination of mysterious forces and laws; but a firm faith in One who is a very Father, tenderly cherishing the weak, caring for every child's life, comforting in sorrow, sheltering in danger, abundantly rewarding every good word and work. Would that the strong confidence of this man were ours!"—*Braden.*

"There is nothing softer than a feather. You have noticed, when a bird returns from flight, how gently it stoops over the nest. The young birds are not afraid of having their lives trampled out by the mother-bird. The old whip-poor-will drops into its nest of leaves, the oriole into its casket of bark, the humming-bird into its hammock of moss, gentle as the light. And so, says the Psalmist, He shall cover thee with His wing. Oh, the gentleness of God!"—*Talmage.*

"In summer the hen's wings are a canopy to keep her chickens from the heat of the scorching sun; and in winter they are a mantle to defend them from the injury of the piercing cold. So God's providence and protection makes His children to sprout, thrive, and prosper under it. In prosperity, God's providence keepeth them from the heat of pride; in adversity, it preserveth them from being benumbed with frozen despair."

"Let not us trust to the broken wall of our own strength, or think to lurk under the tottering hedge of our own wealth, or wind—shaken reeds of our unconstant friends; but fly to God, that He may stretch His wings over us, as the cherubim did over the mercy-seat."—*Fuller.*

"Thou, O God, hast created us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee. . . . I have heard all that philosophers can say, but none of them ever said what Jesus of Nazareth has said, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'"—*Augustine.*

"What cares the child when the mother rocks it, though all storms beat without? So we, if God doth shield and tend us, shall be heedless of the tempests and blasts of life, blow they never so rudely."—*Beecher.*

VERSES 13, 14.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Let me find favour.** I find favour (*Le Clerc, Bertheau*). This trans. not in accordance with the modesty of humility which Ruth manifests in the following words (*Keil*). Lange and Keil take it as optative, and translate, "May I find favour." The sense rather is as in Psalm xli. 11. (By this I know that) *I am finding favour*, because Thou comfortest me, etc. (*Speaker's Com.*). She had found favour in his sight already. The words are to be translated as expressing this, and not a further desire. So Gill and others. **Spoken friendly.** Lit. to the heart. Trans. kindly (Gen. xxiv. 3, l. 21); comfortably, (2 Sam. xix. 7), etc. (*Speaker's Com.*). **Be not like unto.** Lit. be not as—that is, not on a par with them (*Wordsworth*). But what am I saying when I call myself thy maiden? I am not worthy to be compared to the least of thy maidens (*Carpzov*). The LXX. leaves out the negative particle, and trans., "I shall be as one of thy handmaidens." So the Syriac, which reads, "And she said to him, Because I have found mercy in thine eyes, my lord, and thou hast consoled me and comforted me, I will be as one of thine handmaids." So the Arabic, with some variations. Boaz had placed her among his handmaids (ver. 9), and goes on to treat her as such (ver. 14). Nothing could be more delicate or appropriate than the language of the Syr. trans., or more in accordance with Eastern ways of speech.

Ver. 14. **At mealtime.** Lit. at the time of food (*Wright*). The time of the noontide lunch. The principal meal was taken after the labours of the day were over (*Steele and Terry*). **Bread,** provisions generally. **Vinegar,** Heb. *chomets*, a cooling and refreshing drink made of sour wine mingled with oil; still used in the East (*Keil, Wordsworth, Rosen., etc.*). A kind of acid sauce (*A. Clarke*). Used because of the heat of the season (*Jarci, Aben Ezra*). The Midrash gives an allegorical sense to this, as meaning the chastisement and affliction of the Messiah. **Dip thy morsel in the vinegar.** Cf. Christ's words when He gave the sop to Judas (John xiii. 26). The Arabs to this day dip the bread and hand together (*Dr. Shaw*). It is truly incredible how the biscuit, eaten with vinegar and oil, strengthens the weary and exhausted system, and restores its powers (*Heberer*). The drink of the Roman soldiers, called *posca*, consisted of water and vinegar (*Lange*). **Sat beside the reapers.** From this *we may not infer* the two sexes ordinarily took their meals together (*Steele and Terry*). **Parched corn.** Made of the best ears, when they are not too ripe. Roasted in a pan or on an iron plate (*Robinson*). The green ears become half charred by the roasting, and there was a pleasant mingling of milky wheat and a fresh crust flavour as we chewed the parched corn (*Tristram*). **And was sufficed** [satisfied] **and left** [over]. Was obliged to leave some, which it seems (ver. 18) she carried home to her mother-in-law (*Gill*).

VERSE 13.

Theme.—THE HEART REALIZING A MINISTRY OF LOVE.

"Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful."—*Shakespeare.*

"Low at Thy feet I lie, my Saviour and my God,
Low at Thy feet I lie, nor feel the chastening rod;
Who lose their all to find the Spirit here,
Have found this freedom from all further fear,
Safe at Thy feet."—*B.*

Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that [or, **I am finding, etc., because** ***thou hast comforted, etc.***

A thankful heart will seek the continuance even of undeserved favours. Ruth did not wonder more at the kindness of Boaz (ver. 10), than show herself ready to respond to it. The text is not so much a request as an acknowledgment;—she had found favour in his sight already [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes],—and should be so translated.

See here, **I. The secret of all true and effective ministries.** (1) *He had "spoken to the heart"* [so the Heb., LXX.]. The hidden springs of sensibility had been opened, and here is the response. So when the Jews comforted Mary and Martha (John xi. 19), the Syriac translates, "they spake with their heart." All other speech ineffective in comparison with this, especially so when speaking on such tender and momentous subjects as the soul's refuge, "the wings of the Almighty." (2) *He had spoken kindly in praising her virtues and in praying for her.* Kind words generally, if not always, unlock the human heart. (3) *He had comforted her in deed as well as in speech.* What wonder that she says, or seems to say, "I know by this that I am finding favour in thy sight"!

See here, **II. A beautiful instance of the heart becoming conscious of this ministry of love.** The meaning of his kindness dawns upon her, and is dawning, as she recounts the manner of its manifestation. [Trans. (I see that) I am finding favour in thy sight, because thou comfortest me (*Speaker's Com.*)]. So there is a special moment in the history of every Christian, when the heart begins to realize the Divine love. His comforts and His tenderness to us are seen, and shine out the more conspicuously as tokens of His regard.

Note. *She was not one of his handmaids, and yet she realizes that he is treating her as such.* Gives her a position among them, etc. So the Apostle sees himself as one born out of due season, not meet to be called an apostle, and yet raised to these privileges, etc. (1 Cor. xv. 8—10). So the prodigal finds himself placed among the children, and possessing a goodly heritage [comp. Jer. iii. 19 with Luke xv. 21—23]. So with all who are truly called and chosen of God. They see themselves the recipients of mercies and comforts, as unexpected as they are gracious; and exalted to a position and privileges not only dignified, but prophetic of still greater favours yet to come. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," etc.

See here, **III. An instance of the heart responding to these tokens of goodwill.** Ruth evidently felt that this was her one opportunity, and acts as though she felt it. Had not been forward in making known her claims, but, on the other hand, is not backward in responding to his kindness. (1) *She exalts her benefactor.* She calls him "my lord," and so magnifies his mercy. (2) *She is not unduly exalted herself.* Rather she feels her own humble position the more, and deprecates her own unworthiness: "I am not like unto one of thine handmaidens." So the centurion did not think himself worthy that Christ should come under his roof. To the humble, every mercy comes as the voice of undeserved kindness, which encourages without puffing up (*Macartney*).

So in spiritual things. The soul's response to "Seek ye my face" is, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." While it magnifies the Divine mercy, and enlarges upon

the tokens of the Divine love, it is ready like Ruth to humble itself in the dust at the Master's feet.

LESSONS.—(1) It is lawful to give honourable titles to men, such as befit their place [cf. Gen. xxiii. 6; Num. xii. 11; 1 Sam. i. 15; 1 Kings xviii. 7; 2 Kings viii. 12]. (2) The more humble men of wealth show themselves, the more honour they get (*Bernard*). Those stars seem to us the greatest, and shine the brightest, which are set the lowest (*Fuller*). (3) Comfortable words do good like a medicine (*Trapp*). They do more, they bring out that which is good in the recipient. So here, the more generously Ruth is dealt with, the more unassuming does she become. So with the saints at last (Matt. xxv.): "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred?" etc.

E. Price on this :—

Theme.—THE OUTWARD PROOF OF THE DIVINE REGARD.

He predisposes influential men to give us their affection.

Note the steps of the process :—

1. *We* are rendered acceptable to them, finding "favour" with them.

2. *We* are solaced amidst the providential movements around us. They comfort the heart.

3. *We* are addressed by the assuring words of sympathy.

They express the affection borne to us, and hence (4) we are astonished at the Lord's wonderful condescension to our unworthiness.

Infer. Humility bears direct proportion to our sense of the Divine favour.

Whenever a *Ruth* trusts in God, a *Boaz* is sure to appear.

"To the humble mind of Ruth the words of Boaz were the first sunbeam that broke through the grief and tears of many weeks. Hitherto she had tasted only parting sorrow. Now, for the first time, she is addressed about the God of Israel and His grace. The full import of his words her humble heart does not presume to appropriate. But the kindness of the speaker's voice is for her like the sound of a bubbling spring in the desert to the thirsty. A word of love comes on a loving heart like hers, long afflicted by sorrow, like morning dews on a thirsty field."—*Cassel (in Lange).*

"Oh that ministers had this faculty of speech! not to tickle the ears, teach the heads, or please the brains of the people, but that their sermons might soak and sink to the root of their hearts. But though this may be endeavoured by them, it cannot be performed of them without God's special assistance. We may leave our words at the outward porch of men's ears; but His Spirit must conduct and lodge them in the closet of their hearts."—*Fuller.*

"Pleasant words are like an honeycomb, sweet to the soul. Those words which at once indicate friendship and nourish piety are doubly pleasant. Boaz had not only expressed his affection and esteem to Ruth, but raised her views to the Lord God of Israel, from whom he encouraged her to expect her reward. His words were no less valued by her than his gifts. Words are cheap to ourselves, and they may be very precious to those to whom they are addressed, especially to those who need our sympathy."—*Lawson.*

"A little word in kindness spoken,
A motion, or a tear,
Has often healed the heart that's broken,
And made a friend sincere."

Whittier.

"There are occasions when speech is golden rather than silence, and when an encouraging word would be of more real value than the richest material gift. . . . Some persons are far too much afraid of the effect of a little generous and well-timed praise. They would keep all their flowers in an ice house. Letting in a little sunshine upon them at times would not be amiss. How lavish was the wise and large-hearted Paul with his words of commendation, whenever they could be honestly spoken or written!"—*Dr. A. Thomson.*

"Opportunity is the flower of time, and as the stalk may remain when the flower is cut off, so time may remain with us when opportunity is gone."—*Bond.*

"Augustine being asked what was the first article in the Christian religion, replied, 'Humility;' and what the second, 'Humility;' and what the third, 'Humility.'"—*Dic. of Illustrations.*

"'Lord, when did we do all this?' So completely is their mind and memory filled with His goodness, that there is no standing-place there for any recollection of their own acts of love to Him. So abounding and immeasurable appears His love to them, that less than nothing, in the comparison, seems every act of theirs for Him in return. Like Ruth, they can praise Him for the comfort He has bestowed upon them, for the gracious and friendly way in which He has spoken to

them; but all this only increases their sense of their own unworthiness of such mercy."—*Tyng.*

"The train of our adorable Immanuel is so august, so glorious by His communicated grace, that the poor believer cannot easily be brought to consider himself amongst the happy number. All the holy angels, all the glorified saints, day and night attend upon His pleasure; ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him, and thousands of thousands fly at His command. The patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and evangelists, the noble army of martyrs, and all the spirits of just men made perfect, swell His brilliant train; and how can I, who am so black and swarthy, so wretched and sinful, be numbered amongst company so honourable? Whence is it to me that my Lord should regard me with favour, and permit me to approach Thy sacred presence, and encourage me to feed on the bounties of Thy grace?"—*Macgowan.*

VERSE 14.

Theme.—PROVISION FOR THE STRANGER AT THE GATE.

"That best portion of a good man's life;
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love."—*Wordsworth.*

"A poor man, served by thee, shall make thee rich;
A sick man, helped by thee, shall make thee strong;
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest."—*Mrs. E. B. Browning.*

God has from the beginning made the cause of the poor man His own (*Baldwin Brown*). Rich men, if good men, are to be His almoners. To such Christ says, "The poor ye have always with you." See how natural kindness is to such! one deed of love leading to another and a better almost unconsciously. That of Boaz like an open fountain when it has once begun to flow (*Dr. Thomson*). From kind actions he goes on to comforting words, and from comforting words to kind actions once again. Wonderful how Providence does open the heart to strangers! Joseph was so affected by the treatment he received as such in Egypt, that he called one of his sons by a name expressive of what he felt (*Toller*). Boaz, in his treatment of Ruth, a beautiful illustration of the way Christ receives such.

I. He invites her to come and partake of the meal provided for his servants. Not meet to give the children's bread unto dogs (Matt. vii. 6; Mark vii. 27); and yet, from the voice calling Adam in the garden, to the Spirit and the bride saying "Come," in the Apocalypse, the Word of God is full of invitations to wandering, weary men. [Cf. also Luke xiv. 21—23.]

II. He seats her in honour among his reapers. So the Saviour calls the Gentiles to be co-heirs with His own people; puts the alien among His children; exalts Saul the persecutor to be the chiefest among the apostles; gives His saints at last an inheritance among the angels of God.

III. He reaches forth his own hand to provide for her wants. So the Saviour sent not a servant, but came Himself, to provide for man's need. "He saw there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isa. lix. 16) "Therefore," He says, "mine own arm brought salvation" (Isa. lxiii. 5).

IV. He satisfies these wants completely. There was plain fare, but it was sufficient. Nature is content with a little, and hunger hunteth not after delicacies (*Trapp*). So in the spiritual realm, every real want of man is provided for by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon on this (condensed):—

Theme.—MEALTIME IN THE CORNFIELD: A HARVEST SERMON

1. God's reapers have their mealtimes. A good master will not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. Christ's reapers not only have a blessed reward at last; they have also plenteous comforts by the way. *They have* (1) *mealtimes,*

when they come together to listen to the word preached. Where the doctrines of grace are plainly and boldly delivered in connection with the other truths of revelation; where the cross is lifted up, where the work of the Spirit is not forgotten, there is sure to be food for the children of God. Our hearers must have their portion of meat in due season. There must be something for all—milk for babes, etc.

(2) *Mealtimes in our private readings and meditations.* Meditation is digestion, and the finest wheat is to be found in secret prayer. The shepherd of Salisbury Plain said, when his wallet was empty, his Bible was meat to him. (3) *One mealtime that is specially ordained*—in the supper of our Lord. In keeping the Master's command there is great reward. Like poor Mephibosheth, we are made to sit at David's table. The prodigal eats the meat of children.

(4) *Mealtimes which God gives us at seasons when perhaps we little expect them.* In the street, in the middle of business; when dull and earth-bound; suddenly. In the morning, as if the dew was visiting the flowers; in the evening, etc. (5) *Mealtimes at certain seasons when we may expect them.* The Eastern reaper has a set time. So *in affliction* we may expect them; *after toil* we may look for them; and again, *before a trial.* Elijah must be entertained beneath a juniper tree, for he is to go forty days in the strength of that meat. *After* trouble or arduous service.

II. To these meals the gleaner is affectionately invited. The poor trembling stranger, who has no right to be in the field, except the right of charity, is called to the meals of the strong-handed, full-assured reaper.

(1) The gleaner is invited *to come.* "At mealtimes *come thou hither.*" None should be kept away from the place of feasting, the house of God, by personal character, or poverty, or physical infirmities. A poor deaf woman, asked why she was always there, replied, "that God was pleased to give her many a sweet thought upon the text while she sat in His house." (2) Again, *not only to come, but to eat.* Whatever the sweet and comfortable word, the broken and the contrite spirit is invited to partake of it. You are saying, "I have no right;" but He gives you the invitation. "You are unworthy;" but He bids you come. Further, Ruth was not only invited to eat the bread, but *to dip her morsel in the vinegar*—a sauce which the Orientals used with their bread. So the Lord's reapers have not merely doctrines, but the holy unction which is the essence of doctrines—not merely truths, but the hallowing and ravishing delight which accompanies the truths.

III. Boaz reached her the parched corn. Christ does this to believers (1) when He inspires their faith; (2) when He sheds abroad the love of God in their hearts; (3) when He gives us close communion with Himself; (4) when He gives us the infallible witness that we are born of God. Philip de Morny was wont to say that the Holy Spirit had made his salvation as clear to him as ever a problem proved to a demonstration in Euclid could be.

IV. She did eat, and was sufficed, and left. Sooner or later every penitent shall become a satisfied believer—head, heart, hope, desire, conscience, judgment, memory, imagination, all filled.

E. Price on this:—

Theme.—THE COMMON MEAL.

It should be characterized by the following particulars:—

It should indicate the Divine hand in providing it.

It should minister to the calm contentment of our hearts.

It should indicate a self-respect before men.

It should prepare for the next duties in life.

Hence conclude—

If God provide for a *Ruth*, the daily bread will not only come to the hand, but satisfy all the longings of the heart.

"One fact I think I have everywhere observed: the farther one moves from the high road and the busy marts of men, the more people are shut in by the mountains, isolated and confined to the simplest wants of life, the more they draw their maintenance from simple, humble, and unchangeable pursuits; so much the better, the more obliging, the more friendly, unselfish, and hospitable are they."—*Goethe.*

"You have seen the stagnant pool, overgrown with weeds, into which the rain falls and the showers descend, but which gives out no fertilizing stream to water the barren earth around. There is the image of an avaricious and selfish life—a life stagnant and noxious in the sight of God and man. And you have seen the mountain lake, clear as crystal, into which the brooks run and the streamlets flow, but which sends them forth again a broad river to refresh and make glad the earth. There is the image of a life responding to the law of Christian usefulness, counting itself as steward only for a while, and not as owner of all that it possesses."—*B.*

"Wherefore doth the Lord make your cup run over, but that other men's lips might taste the liquor? The showers that fall upon the highest mountains should glide into the lowest valleys."—*Secker.*

"The precept of love was given also in the moral law. That law contains ten commandments, but they may all be reduced to this, 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.' . . . If we go farther back still, we shall find the ancient commandment in existence; for the law of love is as old as human nature itself. 'God created man in His own image'—gave him a spiritual nature, possessed of the powers of thought, will, conscience, imagination, and the faculty of goodness or love. Two things should be noticed with regard to the last of these. First, the faculty of love belongs to him as man—is part of his nature. Treat the flower rightly, plant it where the sun-rays play, and it will grow and become beautiful, and will fill the surrounding atmosphere with its fragrance, for it is made to give itself away; and if man had been true to himself, if he had avoided sin, and lived in all his faculties, his good-will and love would have gone forth to his fellows as naturally as perfume from the flower. Second, the sense or feeling that love is right, that it is a duty; and that to hate others, or even to be indifferent to them, is wrong. This is the Divine testimony in man's conscience, the 'old commandment' of the gospel and of the law in another form—a silent commandment which makes itself heard and felt without the use of words."—*Thomas Jones.*

"The very essence of charity is disinterested goodness; and although we may like it the better for its returns of benefit, we must obey its impulses from delight itself. Where we fail in this, our charity fails, although our deeds of beneficence still be abounding."—*Anon.*

"The rich man's superfluity was ordained to relieve the poor man's necessity. A lady, on giving sixpence to a beggar, accosted him thus: 'I have now given you more than God ever gave me.' To whom he replied, 'No, madam; God hath given you all your abundance.' 'That is your mistake,' said she, 'for He hath but lent it me that I might bestow it on such as you.'"—*Secker.*

"Men resemble the gods in nothing so much as in doing good to their fellow-creatures."—*Cicero.*

"Seneca the heathen inculcates a principle worthy the credence of every Christian: 'I believe I truly enjoy no more of the world's affluence than what I willingly distribute to the necessitous.' Without your mercy the poor cannot live on earth, and without God's mercy you shall not live in heaven."—*Secker.*

"This also is given to pious souls by God, that being devoted to Him, He often secretly, and even without their becoming aware of it, impels them to this or that good action."—*Starke.*

"Is not this the very way in which our rich Kinsman deals with those whom He loves and saves? . . . He calls poor fainting sinners to come without doubt or fear, and take their place among the company of the redeemed; for everything is there provided which they can need—abounding grace for abounding sin. He ministers Himself to their secret wants. He reaches forth with His own hand the parched corn of His sacrifice for them. And in this secret, personal, divine ministration, they eat and are sufficed."—*Tyng* (condensed).

"'Oh! but,' says one, 'how can it be? I am a stranger.' Yes, a stranger; but Jesus Christ loves the stranger. 'A publican, a sinner;' but He is 'the Friend of publicans and sinners.' 'An outcast;' but He 'gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.' 'A stray sheep;' but the shepherd 'leaves the ninety and nine,' to seek it. 'A lost piece of money,' but He 'sweeps the house' to find it. 'A prodigal son;' but He sets the bells a-ringing when He knows that thou wilt return. Come, Ruth! Come, trembling gleaner! Jesus invites thee; accept the invitation. 'At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar."—*Spurgeon.*

"We must not look upon this as being some sour stuff. No doubt there are crabbed souls in the Church, who always dip their morsel in the sourest imaginable vinegar, and with a grim liberality invite others to share a little comfortable misery with them; but the vinegar in my text is altogether another thing. This was either a compound of various sweets expressed from fruits, or else it was that weak kind of wine mingled with water which is still commonly used in the harvest-fields of Italy and the warmer parts of the world—a drink not exceedingly strong, but excellently cooling, and good enough to impart a relish to the reapers' food."—*Ibid.*

"You may suspect some danger nigh when your delights are overflowing. If you see a

ship taking in great quantities of provision, it is bound for a distant port. And when God gives you extraordinary seasons of communion with Jesus, you may look for long leagues of tempestuous sea. Sweet cordials prepare for stern conflicts. Times of refreshing also occur *after* trouble or arduous service. Christ was tempted of the devil, and *afterwards* angels came and ministered unto Him. Jacob wrestled with God, and then afterwards, at Mahanaim, hosts of angels met him. Abraham wars with the kings, and returns from their slaughter; then it is that Melchisedec refreshes him with bread and wine. After conflict, content; after battle, banquet. When thou hast waited on thy Lord, then thou shalt sit down, and thy Master will gird Himself and wait upon thee."—*Ibid.*

VERSES 15—17.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 15. **And when she was risen up.** Evident from this and the previous phrase that Boaz said, "Come thou hither," as he himself sat among his reapers at the mid-day meal. So that a pause may be understood between the first conversation, ending with ver. 13, and the invitation itself, during which Ruth goes on with her gleaning. Then there is the rest lasting throughout the hour of meals, in the tent or house for the reapers, followed by fresh toil until the evening. **Commanded his young men.** He had charged them already not to touch her (ver. 9). **Let her glean even among the sheaves.** She may also glean between the sheaves (*Keil*). A rare privilege, not allowed to ordinary gleaners (*Steele and Terry*); and a still greater concession than that in ver. 9—"after the reapers." **And reproach her not.** (Heb. shame her not); μὴ καταισχύνητε (LXX.). Ye shall not shame her [do her any injury (Jud. xviii. 7)] (*Keil*). In other words, they were not to say things to her which would make her blush (*Lange*), not to remind her of her poverty, etc.

Ver. 16. **And let fall also of the handfuls.** Let fall also out of your armfuls that you have reaped (*Vulg.*). Pull out from the bundles (*Lange*). Ye shall also draw out of the bundles for her (*Keil*). It is necessary to distinguish carefully between "the sheaves" (ver. 15) and the "handfuls." The former is the sheaf already bound by the maidservants, and lying on the ground; the latter is the bundle as taken up and still held in the arm, *manipulus* (*Lange*). **And leave them.** Let them lie (*Keil*). **And rebuke her not.** Scold her not (*Lange, Keil*). These directions of Boaz went far beyond the bounds of generosity and compassion for the poor, and show that he felt a peculiar interest in Ruth, with whose circumstances he was well acquainted, and who had won his heart by her humility, etc.,—a fact important to notice in connection with the further course of the history (*Keil*).

Ver. 17. **And beat out,** ἐῤῥάβδισεν (LXX.). With a stick (*Wordsworth*). A process often witnessed by modern travellers in the East (*Steele and Terry*). **About an ephah of barley.** About a bushel and a half (*ibid*). About twenty to twenty-five lbs. (*Keil*). Impossible to ascertain the quantity, still less its weight, exactly, but it was considerable, say fifty-five pounds (*Lange*). About eight gallons; see Exod. xvi. 36 (*Wordsworth*). She had gleaned so much, she could not carry it home in the ear (*ibid.*). **An ephah exactly equal to an English cubic foot (*Conder*). The quantity of manna contained by the ephah was sufficient for ten men (cf. Exod. xvi. 16, with ver. 36).**

VERSES 15, 16.

***Theme.*—LIBERAL GIVING, LIKE GOD'S.**

"And the more thou spendest
From thy little store;
With a double bounty,
God shall give thee more."

"Thrice happy man! enabled to pursue
What all so wish, but want the power to do!"—*Pope.*

And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean among, etc., and reproach her [shame her] ***not. And let fall, etc., and rebuke*** [scold] ***her not.***

Rested, refreshed, invigorated with food, as well as comforted by the kind words of the master of the harvest-field, Ruth evidently rises to her labour with new pleasure and fresh earnestness. Note. (*a*) *The poor can appreciate and respond to all this, without presuming upon it, or without being encouraged to idleness.* Kindness to the deserving is a stimulus, an incentive to fresh enterprise and

diligence. (*b*) *The true use of rest and food is to strengthen us for resuming our toil.*

Again, mark how *the diligent hand obtains new and ever-increasing favours.* God's law is, to him that hath shall be given, and labour is the appointed way of increase, from which even Paradise itself was not exempted (Gen. ii. 15). He who would have must get, and he who would have much, must get diligently. We are all gleaners, and the world is our harvest-field; and productive gleaning is, and always has been, to the earnest and the industrious. God helps us, both in spiritual and temporal things; but He in no way does so with a desire to do away with human responsibility. He scatters His blessings around us, but we ourselves must gather and make them our own. His giving is never intended to abate our diligence. Boaz here gives from pure goodness and nobleness of heart, and therefore his benevolence is a type of the divine and perfect giving of God.

I. He gives unexpectedly. This is seen in two ways: (1) *He allows her to "glean among the sheaves,"* in a place where her labour will be more productive. So the Divine hand, in reward for past diligence, and as a proof of present favour, leads men to new spheres and employments, more fertile, as well as more dignified and productive. Joseph is exalted in Egypt, and David in Israel, and Paul among the apostles. Note. *It is lawful to extend favours more to one than another (Fuller),* in those things which are free favours (*ibid.*), in those things which are our own (Matt. xx. 15), as with Boaz here. So with the Divine grace, and those privileges and opportunities God bestows in a seemingly unequal way among men. He gives and rewards not without a meaning, and not without a reason—this were impossible with Him; but He will be accountable to no man for His dealings with the most highly favoured among men. The answer of sovereign grace to the caviller is, and always must be, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" "Is thine eye evil?" etc.

(2) *He charges his reapers to scatter handfuls for her.* He increases her gleanings, and yet makes it appear the fruit of her own industry (*Thomson*). [See on ver. 8, 9, div. I., p. 108.] And in our own lives how often God has given (*a*) beyond our fondest anticipations, and (*b*) in ways which seem the result of our own thrift and endeavours. [Examples: Jacob in Laban's household; Daniel in Babylon.] We say, in our short-sightedness, possibly, that our own hand and our own wisdom has gained us all this increase; but is it so?

II. He gives liberally. Nowhere have the poor been cared for so liberally as among the Jews (*Baldwin Brown*). The law made it a sacred duty not to reap "wholly the corners of the field," etc. (Lev. xix. 9, 10), but to leave something behind for the destitute and the stranger. Boaz, however, goes beyond his creed; and so Ruth, who expected to gather a little, gathers abundantly. This is the Divine idea, "good measure, pressed down, running over;" not the giving with a niggardly spirit and a grudging hand, but largely, overflowingly, beyond that which is due, beyond that which is expected or even deserved. (1) *So good men give.* They live to bestow happiness. Riches are lent, not given, and bring the purest pleasure when scattered around upon the worthy and the necessitous. Wealth—

> "By disburdening grows
> More fruitful, which instructs us not to spare."—*Milton.*

So God gives (*a*) largely, (*b*) liberally, (*c*) lavishly, (*d*) constantly. Note. *He can make the world, to every one of us, a harvest-field, full of temporal and spiritual blessings.*

III. He gives without reproach and without rebuke. His reapers are only his agents in this matter; the master's will is to control all. An alien, and a daughter of the sinful race of Moab, shall glean in the choicest portions of his harvest-field, shielded from prejudice, and without a single word to remind her of her poverty, or her unworthiness (as some would think it), or of the unexpected

favour bestowed upon her. A word to a delicate, sensitive spirit like that she has displayed would spoil all; therefore rebuke her not. Note. *Kindness shows itself not only in doing good, but also in preventing evil and reproach.* How exactly all this corresponds to the Divine dealings with sinful men! When they come in humble, suppliant attitude, it is said, "None of their sins shall be mentioned unto them." God shields from shame, as well as bestows pardon, and sovereign grace is always willing to blot out the past. The inspired conception of the Divine benevolence is that He "giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not" (James i. 5).

Again, God charges others, lest they should reproach the sensitive and the tender-hearted among His children (Isa. xl. 1, 2; lxv. 25), as well as the wanderer and the stranger who cast themselves on His protecting care. The Saviour's disciples were reapers in a field "white unto the harvest," and yet, when they would have rebuked others who were not "of them," He said, "Forbid them not" (Matt. ix. 39).

IV. **He gives in encouragement of her own labours.** The kindness of Boaz suited (1) *to her situation*, (2) *to her employment* as a gleaner in the harvest field. So God gives *in kind* as well as in degree, according to our present capacity. He gives along the lines we ourselves are laying down—a solemn yet certain truth—and according to the spirit and diligence we ourselves are displaying. He gives "wood and hay and stubble" to such as are seeking such; the pure and precious grain of the kingdom only to those whom He is certain have sought, and sought diligently, for the same.

IMPROVEMENT. (1) Charity, wisely directed, will not tempt the poor to idleness (*Lawson*). (2) If we come into fellowship with God, He will protect our characters from shame (*E. Price*), as well as our lives from want. We are to do our duty, and leave the rest with Him. When led into danger, we are to go quietly on, trusting to His guidance, as well as to our own integrity.

"The end of feeding is to fall to our calling. Let us not therefore, with Israel, sit down to eat and to drink, and so rise up to play; but let us eat to live, not live to eat. We need not make the clay cottage of our body much larger than it is by immoderate feeding: it is enough if we maintain it so with competent food, that God, our Landlord, may not have just cause to sue us for want of reparations."—*Fuller.*

"That bird was once a woman, and it is a good lesson she reads us. One day she was kneading bread in her trough, under the eaves of her house, when our Lord passed by, leaning on St. Peter. She did not know it was the Saviour and His apostle, for they looked like two poor men travelling past her door. 'Give us of your dough, for the love of God,' said the Lord Christ: 'we have come far across the field, and have fasted long.' Gertrude pinched off a small piece for them; but on rolling it in her trough, to get it into shape, it grew and grew, and filled up the trough completely. She looked at it in wonder. 'No,' said she, 'that is more than you want;' so she pinched off a smaller piece, and rolled it out as before; but the smaller piece filled up the trough, just as the other had done; so she put that aside too, and pinched a smaller bit still. But the miracle was just as apparent, the smaller bit filling up the trough the same as ever. Gertrude's heart was hardened still more; she put that aside also. 'I cannot give you any to-day,' said she; for the greed of her heart was to divide all her dough into little bits and roll it into loaves. 'Go on your journey, and the Lord prosper you.' Then the Lord Christ was angry, and her eyes were opened, and she fell down on her knees to hear Him say, 'I gave you plenty, but that hardened your heart, so that plenty was not a blessing to you; I will try you now with the blessing of poverty; you shall henceforth seek your food day by day, and always between the wood and the bark.'"—*Norwegian Legend of the Gertrude Bird.*

"We learn, that is the best charity which so relieves people's wants as that they are still continued in their calling. For, as he who teacheth one to swim, though haply he will take him by the chin, yet he expecteth that the learner shall nimbly ply the oars of his hands and feet, and strive and struggle with all his strength to keep himself above water; so those who are beneficial to poor people may justly require of them that they use both their hands to work and feet to go in their calling, and themselves take all due labour that they may not sink in the gulf of penury. Relieve a husbandman, yet so as he may still continue in his husbandry; a tradesman, yet so he may still go on in his trade; a poor scholar, yet so he may still proceed in his studies. Thereby the commonwealth shall be a gainer. Drones bring no honey to the hive; but the painful hand of each private man contributes some profit to the public good. Hence, by the able poor, the more diligent they be-

the more bountiful men will be to them; while their bodies are freed from many diseases, their souls from many sins, wherof idleness is the mother Laziness makes a breach in our soul, where the devil doth assault us with greatest advantage; and when we are most idle in our vocations, then he is most busy in his temptations.'—*Fuller.*

"There can be no wrong in those things which are free favours. I am not less just to him to whom I give less, but I am more merciful to him to whom I give more. . . . Shall it not therefore be lawful for the Lord of heaven to bestow wealth, honour, wisdom, effectual grace, blessings outward and inward, on one, and deny them to another? You, therefore, whom God hath suffered to glean among the sheaves, and hath scattered whole handfuls for you to gather; you that abound and flow with His favours, be heartily thankful unto Him. He hath not dealt so with everyone, neither have all such a large measure of His blessings."—*Fuller.*

"I know some preachers who never went to Martin Luther's school; they may have prayer and meditation, but they have never been schooled by temptation; and if we are not much tempted ourselves, if we are not emptied from vessel to vessel ourselves, we are in very great danger, when we are dealing with these Ruths, lest we be hard with them, and rebuke and reproach them, when instead thereof we should hear the Master say, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem.' Now I take it that we do very much reproach these tender ones *when we set up standards in our ministry to which we tell them they must come or else perish.*"—*Spurgeon.*

"But then, brethren, you will notice that these reapers were to let handfuls fall *on purpose for her.* Well, then, ye reapers in God's field, let your preaching be very *personal.* Oh! I love, when I draw the bow, not to do it at a venture, but to single out some troubled heart, and speak to you all as though there were but one here; not pouring the oil over the wound, but coming up to the edge of the gaping sore to pour *in* oil and wine. These poor Ruths will not dare to take the corn unless we put it right in their way. They are so faithful, so timorous, that though it seems to be scattered for everybody, they think it cannot be for them: but if it be *there,* put *there* so that they cannot mistake it, then they say, 'Well, that is for me; ay, that is what *I* have felt; that is what *I* want;' and they cannot, unbelieving though they be, they cannot help stooping down and picking up the handful that is let fall *on purpose* for them. Then, if it be so, our preaching must always be very *affectionate.*'—*Ibid.*

"Dr Manton once preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, and a great crowd went to listen to him. A poor man, who had walked fifty miles to hear the good doctor, afterwards plucked him by the sleeve, and said, 'There was nothing for me this morning.' The doctor had preached a very learned sermon, full of Greek and Latin quotations which the poor countryman could not understand; but the doctor had not expected him, and there was nothing for him. I think there should always be in our ministry some things for poor Ruth, so plain and so simple, that the wiseacres will turn up their noses, and say, 'What platitudes!' Never mind, if Ruth gets a handful of corn, our Master at the last shall know who did His errand best, and served Him with a perfect heart.'—*Ibid.*

"While such a practice as is here enjoined would have been dishonest and unfaithful without the express authority of the master, not to have done it after it was enjoined would have been undutiful in its turn."—*Thomson.*

"Doubtless Boaz, having taken notice of the good nature, dutiful carriage, and the near affinity of Ruth, could not but purpose some greater beneficence and higher respects to her; yet how he fits his kindness to her condition, and gives her that which to her seemed much, though he thought it little. Thus doth the bounty of our God deal with us. It is not for want of love that He gives us no greater measure of grace, but for want of our fitness and capacity. He hath reserved greater preferments for us, when it shall be seasonable for us to receive them."—*Bishop Hall.*

VERSE 17.

Theme.—LABOUR UNTIL THE EVENING.

"When the corn's rustle on the ear doth come,
When the eve's beetle sounds its drowsy hum,
When the stars, dewdrops of the summer sky,
Watch over all with soft and loving eye."—*Nicoll.*

"Night is the time for rest;
How sweet, when labours close,
To gather round an aching breast
The curtain of repose,
Stretch the tired limbs, and lay the head
Upon our own delightful bed."—*J. Montgomery.*

So she gleaned in the fields until even, and beat out, etc.

The longest and most eventful day must come to a close at last. So with

this of Ruth's toil, and the beginning of her recompense. (1) *She was not weary in well doing.* (2) She *did not presume* upon the fact that Boaz had so greatly and so generously increased her gleanings. No! She perseveres in her labour of love until the due and proper hour for retiring; then, pleased with what she had gained by her own industry, and careful to secure it, she lingers to beat out the corn, instead of taking it where it might trouble Naomi—a thoughtfulness surpassing even that of most natural children to their parents.

Learn, as suggested here—

I. That it is good to abide where we do well. Boaz had charged her not to glean in another field, but to stand fast by his maidens (ver. 8), and here is the result. She reaped the fruit of her constancy; (1) a lesson *to the unstable in temporal things.* Prosperity only follows persevering labour. It is the diligent hand that maketh rich; "the rolling stone gathers no moss" (*Braden*). (2) *To the unstable in the kingdom of God*—men who wander from one church to another, from one preacher to another, from one sphere of duty to another Note. *Every man has his appropriate place:* the aim of life should be first to find it and then to keep it.

II. That it is good to labour where God sends success. Can Ruth return to the city with a dejected countenance? Never, while Jehovah lives (*E. Price*). And why? Evident that she was in the place God had appointed for her. We misread the whole narrative, too, if we fail to see that Boaz is only an instrument in the Divine hands. In all labour, even that of gleaning, there is profit; but see what gleaning is when God guides to the harvest field! The humblest toil then becomes not only productive, but beautiful, and pregnant with after consequences.

III. That it is good to toil on until God's appointed time of rest. "Man goeth forth to his labour until the evening." There is a time, then, for going forth, and there is also a time for returning. The day for toil, the night for repose, this is God's great appointed law. Labour is man's heritage (Gen. ii. 15), and we are happy only as we bow to this. Life, health, man's physical and moral well-being depend upon obedience. But mark! *Labour, too, has its boundaries, the time when it must end;* and from this thought comes a *stimulus* to which even the great Master Himself responded, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is *day*," as well as a *hope* which looks forward to rest and reward when toil is over. Note *Rest time is not waste time* (*Spurgeon*). The pause prepares mind and body alike for further service.

"King Alphonsus doing something with his hands, and labouring so, as some which beheld him found fault, smiled and said, 'Hath God given hands to kings in vain?'" —*Bernard.*

"I do not like to see a Christian man too eager for holidays, nor doling out his services in exact and precise proportion to his wages, bitterly complaining if he is requested to do a little more than is in 'the bond,' ready to fling down his tools before the first stroke of the clock has fairly struck which tells that the day's work may cease. A man should be in love with his work, and should take as the mottoes for his inspiration the words, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,' etc., 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit,' etc."—*Braden.*

"Sarah kneaded cakes; Rachel fed sheep; Rebekah drew water; Tamar baked cakes. Suetonius reporteth of Augustus Cæsar, that he made his daughters to learn to spin; and Pantaelon relates the same of Charles the Great. Yet now-a-days (such is the pride of the world) people of far meaner quality scorn so base employments."—*Fuller.*

"Such diligence is supremely praiseworthy, and deserves, nay, ensures an abundant reward. It is a great thing in life to be wholly devoted to the work we have in hand, and to be able to say, 'This one thing I do.' For there is an incalculable multitude of people who are 'everything by turns and nothing long.' Shifty, changeful, dissatisfied, untrustworthy, they pass from one occupation to another with the ease and rapidity with which the wind veers round all the points of the compass; busy, fussy folk who are excited, enthusiastic about one thing to-day, and equally excited and enthusiastic about another and totally opposite thing to-morrow. All they undertake is regarded of the same importance, to be entered upon with unrestrained vigour; but nothing prospers that they touch, because they *only* touch it, and soon it droops and fades."—*Braden.*

"Seek a retentive memory, to keep in thy hand what thou hast gathered or else thou wilt be like a silly gleaner who stoops to glean one ear, and drops another at the same time. Carry home what of truth thou canst. Take notes in thy heart. And when thou hast gathered and hast thy hands full, take care to discriminate. Ruth, we are told, threshed her corn, and left the straw behind, and took home the good wheat. Do thou the same."—*Spurgeon.*

"Corn, even the finest kidney of the wheat, grows encompassed with chaff, and therefore must be beaten out and winnowed before it is fit for use. . . . Paul, that incomparable preacher, freely confessed that he saw and prophesied but in part: if he in part, surely we in a very little part; consequently much of our own chaff is mixed with our Redeemer's wheat: and that you our hearers are called to beat out what you glean, by a diligent search of the Scriptures, by meditation and prayer." —*Macgowan.*

"The materials of the temple were so hewed and carved, both stone and wood, before that they were brought unto Jerusalem, that there was not so much as the noise of a hammer heard in the temple. So Ruth fits all things in a readiness before she goes home, that so no noise might be made at home, to disturb her aged mother."—*Fuller.*

VERSES 18—23.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Her mother-in law saw.** With astonishment at the quantity evidently. And she brought forth. And she showed (*Vulgate, Syr.-Arab Wright, Lange*). Brought forth out of a wallet (*Targum*). Drew out of her pocket, as the Chaldee has correctly supplied (*Keil*) That she had reserved. Of the parched corn (see ver. 14). **After she was sufficed.** Satisfied (*Lange*). Lit. From her satiety (*Morison*).

Ver. 19. **Where wroughtest thou?** Where didst thou procure? (*Dr. Cassel*) Where hast thou stayed? (*Wright*). Where strayedest thou? (*Gesen*). As in EV. LXX Vulg Rosen. Bertheau. **Blessed be he.** Naomi seems to have seen at once that someone must have treated Ruth with unexpected and unwonted kindness. **Did take knowledge.** Friendly and special notice. The same word used by Ruth (ver. 10) in expressing her gratitude to Boaz (*Lange*) **With whom I wrought.** Certainly a better translation than "with whom I spent my time," as Wright would appear to propose. **Boaz.** She could not know what a consolation and joy the utterance of this name conveyed to Naomi (*Lange*).

Ver. 20. **Who hath not left off.** Precisely the same expression Eliezer uses when he meets Rebekah, after having prayed for guidance (Gen. xxiv. 27). There, however, it is Jehovah Himself who is pronounced "blessed" (*Speaker's Com.*). Naomi possibly only applied a general formula or even a common proverb to her special case, and in this sense Jehovah alone is to be seen as the source of kindness to the living and the dead. So the Syriac, Arab, Bertheau, Keil, Lange, &c. The Chaldee, LXX., and Vulg. apply the words, however, to Boaz [See on ch. i, 8, and also cf Gen. xiv. 19; Ps. cxv. 15.] **To the living and the dead.** Here is a profession of faith in the existence of the faithful after death (*Wordsworth*). Not so (*Bertheau, Morison*). If these words do not presuppose the immortality of the soul as an article of Israelitish faith, what meaning can they have? (*Lange*). God is not the God of the dead [those who have passed away and are no more for ever] but of the living (Matt. xxii. 32). Ruth is still the wife of the dead in the Hebrew way of thinking and speaking (iv. 5). And does not this and kindred Jewish notions as to the dead having claims upon the living, receiving kindnesses from them, having seed raised up by them, &c., necessarily point to an underlying conviction of the continuing existence of those who have only passed away to the outward senses and sight? **The man is near of kin.** Is our relative (*Keil*). Lit. Near, not in comparison with other relatives, but with men in general (*Lange*). **One of our next kinsmen.** One of our redeemers (*Lange, Keil*) One that hath a right to redeem (*Kitto*). The second in the order of the Goëlim (*Michaelis, Gesenius*). The Redeemer had a right (1) of redeeming the inheritance of the person, (2) of marrying the widow, (3) of avenging the death (*Speaker's Com.*). Cf. Lev. xxv 25-31, 47-55; Deut. xxv. 5-10, xix 1-13; Jer. xxxii. 8-12.

Ver. 21. **He said unto me also.** Even so may he be blessed (*Carpzov, Wordsworth, Wright*). Not so (*Lange*). Yea also he said to me (*Morison*). More! I have not told you all, for he said, &c. (*Lange*) **Keep fast by my young men.** My people (*Keil*). My servants (*Lange*). The people also belong to my house as distinguished from the people of other masters (*Keil*). The masculine here to be taken as including both sexes (*Gesen, Furst, Maurer*). Boaz (ver 8) and Naomi (ver. 22), however, use the feminine form, which seems to show that the distinction of gender was no longer neglected (*Lange*). A special point is made of Ruth being allowed to glean among the sheaves close to the reapers (ver. 15), that is, the young men, evidently a special and privileged place. The young men had a commission, too, from their master to countenance and encourage her (ver. 16).

Ver. 22. **It is good.** The key to much which follows as well as an approval of what has passed. **That they meet thee not.** Lit., that they do not fall upon thee (*Keil, Wordsworth*) Originally means to light upon, whether for good or evil (*Morison*). Keil views the verb, how-

over, as having only a bad meaning, and as signifying to fall upon a person to smite and ill-treat him. Fall not upon thee, or solicit thee to folly. *Vulgo dicitur castam esse quam nemo rogarit* (*Trapp*). In a strange field she would be exposed to annoyances and, possibly, insults (*Steele and Terry*), from which Boaz has specially guarded her in his (ver. 9, 15, 16). To go elsewhere also would be to show a want of appreciation for the kind words and actions of which she has been the recipient already. Her seemingly needless repetition of this idea of clinging to the fields and servants of Boaz, is, indeed, highly artistic, and serves to prepare the mind for what is to follow.

Ver. 23. So she kept fast. And she kept gleaning along with the maiden of Boaz (*Wright*) (cf. v. 9; 21). Gives the opportunity for Boaz to acquire that knowledge of Ruth and respect for her implied in iii. 10, 11). By the maidens. Showing clearly that his maidens were only gleaners (*Speaker's Com.*). Unto the end of barley and wheat harvest. Until about the beginning of June. The two harvests would cover from two to three months. And dwelt with her mother in-law. After she returned to her mother-in-law (*Vulg., Luther, Coverdale*). And lived with her mother-in-law (*Kiel*). A tacit allusion to the fact that a change took place when the harvest was over (*ibid*). She did not gad abroad, but kept her aged mother company at home (*Patrick*).

VERSE 18.

Theme.—THE BREAD-WINNER AND HER PRECIOUS BURDEN.

"Find out men's wants and will
And meet them there. All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses."—*Herbert.*

And she took it up . . . . . and she brought forth, and gave, etc.

Ruth *returns* to the city, bearing herself the results of her toil, but not for herself alone. True affection is always carrying some burden or other, and love's crosses are never her own entirely.

She *returns to bestow of her labour.* The needy may often play the benefactor to others. Christ carried a bag to relieve those who were in want, and the poor widow had still "two mites to spare" (Luke xxi. 2). How the text condemns the covetousness of such as Nabal, who have plenty and yet give not out of their abundance!

I. She was frugal. Carefulness as necessary as industry. That nothing be lost for want of frugality comes with the force of Divine authority. "Gather up the fragments," etc. Wisdom teaches us to have an eye upon the future as upon the present. Even dumb creatures, like the ant and the bee, have this instinct. Note. *Wastefulness as much a sin as idleness.*

II. She was frugal amid unexpected abundance. A contrast to such as plunge into mad riot and wanton, reckless wastefulness at such times. The prodigal, when he had obtained his "portion," made all haste to spend it among harlots. Must be confessed that the poor are not always the most careful when fortune favours them. "Beggars on horseback ride the faster to the devil." Note. *A true test of character to be found here.*

"Who cannot live on twenty pound a-year,
Cannot on forty; he's a man of pleasure,
A kind of thing that's for itself too dear."—*Herbert.*

III. She was frugal for the sake of others. The thought of Naomi at home had evidently stimulated her to carefulness as well as industry in the harvest-field. Ruth not one lost in vacant reveries and so missing the hour of service. The spirit of love and self-sacrifice breathes in all that she does. Note. (*a*) *Extravagance is especially reprehensible when there may be those in want at home.* Becomes doubly a sin then to waste, or to neglect opportunities of providing for them. (*b*) *A kindred thoughtfulness to Ruth's not unusual among the poor.* Only that while the good deeds of the rich are concealed with difficulty, theirs are too often passed by unnoticed. How many a heart has thrilled with joy at the thought of being able to minister to the joy of those at home! Burns gives us

the picture of the eldest daughter, in his "Cotter's Saturday Night," bringing home

"her sair-won penny fee
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be."

Ministries like this have gladdened and sweetened family life all the world over. Note. *Men may and ought to find the sweetest and noblest use of all their gains at home.*

LESSONS. (1) Even love must have its burden, if it would enjoy its after-recompense and approval. There are who would scatter without first having gathered, but that is not God's law. (2) The ravishness of this evening hour only follows the gleaning and carefulness of the day. (3) What is gained in a nook of the harvest-field comes to be seen and reported in the city (*Price*).

"They come home from their busy toil feeling that they have the day's sweetest and not always lightest task before them—to lighten the hearts and gladden the lives of those whom they love best. Whatever the world has done *to* them or *for* them they have one thing to do—to do the very best they can for the dear ones round their fireside. Not that these are to be kept always ignorant of the cares, troubles, and losses without which the world's business cannot be carried on."—*Baldwin Brown.*

"See here, the shoulders of God's saints are wonted to the bearing of burthens. Little Isaac carried the faggot wherewith himself was to be sacrificed; our Saviour, His own cross, till His faintness claimed Simeon of Cyrene to be His successor. Yet, let not God's saints be disheartened: if their Father had a 'bottle' wherein He puts the tears which they spend, surely He hath a balance wherein He weighs the burthens which they bear. He keeps a note to what weight their burthens amount, and, no doubt, will accordingly comfort them."—*Fuller.*

"It is no less necessary to be careful of the fruit of our labours, than to labour with diligence. Christ Himself, who could multiply bread at His pleasure, commanded the fragments of the barley loaves and fishes to be gathered up, that nothing might be lost. 'In all labour there is profit,' says the wise man; yet there are some that labour for the wind. They lose what they have wrought, because they suffer it, through their carelessness, to slip through their fingers. This folly, however, is much less frequent in things relating to the body than in those which relate to the soul."—*Lawson.*

"The Church is our mother, whom we are called to serve and comfort; therefore every comfort you glean ought to be brought home to her; so disposed of and applied that she may share in your pleasure."—*Macgowan.*

VERSE 19.

Theme.—HOME CONFIDENCES, MUTUAL CONFESSIONS, AND ENQUIRIES.

"And none can say but all my life
I have His wordis kept,
And summed the actions of the day
Each night before I slept."—*Chatterton.*

"Think nought a trifle, though it small appear—
Small sands the mountain, moments make the year,
And trifles life."—*Young.*

And her mother-in-law said, Where hast thou, etc. . . . Blessed be he, etc. . . . And she showed, etc.

It is in the very nature of affection to feel the interest, solicitude, anxiety expressed here. Parents see their children go out to the snares and difficulties of life. Will they be preserved spotless? etc. More, it is the duty of such to ascertain how their children have been employed, what associations they have formed, with whom and where they have been. *Such sympathetic questioning* (1) elicits confidence, (2) shows thoughtful interest, (3) offers opportunity for wise counsel and encouragement (*Braden*). Carelessness on these points (1) unnatural, (2) dangerous. Even Eli did not sin in neglecting this duty. He

noticed and enquired (1 Sam. ii. 23, 24). His sin was that he restrained not after knowledge (iii. 13).

But see how "love thinketh no evil," and makes even a duty like this free from whatever might be otherwise irksome or unpleasant. Naomi asks from a desire to know who was the instrument in God's hands through whom His bounty came, not from curiosity merely, or from any suspicion concerning Ruth. Favours bestowed naturally bring the desire to know from whom they come.

We have, I. A fitting conclusion to a well-spent day. Note. *Good to sum up the actions of the day* (1) to ourselves, (2) to others when convenient and proper, as here. "Confess your sins one to another." The New Testament idea of a confessor, however, not that of an official person, a "priest," but a friend whom we can trust and to whom we can unbosom, as Ruth evidently did to Naomi [cf. Mal. iii. 16; Judg. v. 11]. Especially is such confession one to another good when accompanied and permeated by a devout spirit such as breathes through the whole context. Note. *When integrity directs our steps there is no need for evasion.* Can give a minute account of our conduct.

II. A mutual stimulus and encouragement to gratitude. Gratitude kindles gratitude. Good deeds to ourselves, recognised and pointed out, bring thankfulness to other hearts beside our own, to the devout everywhere.

> "Whene'er a noble deed is wrought,
> Whene'er is spoken a noble thought,
> Our hearts in glad surprise
> To higher levels rise."—*Longfellow.*

Many men niggardly in letting it be known they have received favours. They would hide the sunshine which has gladdened life in their own hearts, were it possible. Not so Ruth. She brings to her home, and to her friend, these abundant signs and tokens of that which has made the labour of gleaning a light and pleasant task. Christ's command, "Return to thine own house," etc. (Luke v. 39), enforces the duty illustrated here.

It is, III. A mutual stimulus and encouragement to piety. The heart naturally looks upward and thanks God when it comes face to face with noble deeds of any kind. Men stifle the feeling if they can, it may be, and feel ashamed of it, but it is there. Note. *Thanksgiving as natural as prayer.*

Here the kindness of Boaz and the success of Ruth both come in to fan the flame of piety in the heart of Naomi. Her first thought is not that the wants of the morrow are satisfied, and that abundantly, but "Blessed be he," etc. True always that—

> "The tidal wave of deeper souls
> Into our inmost being rolls,
> And lifts us unawares
> Out of all meaner cares."

Noble deeds, when seen and realised, lead men almost unconsciously to think and to speak nobly. Note. *Prayer is sometimes the only possible way left us of expressing our gratitude.* [On these ejaculatory expressions see ch. ii. 12 pp. 116, 117.] The debt contracted in the currency of earth is paid back in the coin of heaven (*Thomson*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) We should take special notice of such as do us good (*Bernard*). (2) A good heart rejoices in the welfare of another (*ibid.*). (3) How naturally the name of God comes in on occasions like these! (4) How potent our kindness may be in quickening the sense of God's kindness (*Cox*).

E. Price on this:—God's Providence an excitement to a question. Wherever can such a blessing have come from? *to a benediction.* Blessed be God in the fact and in the agent of His will; *and to a recognition* of His inscrutable but merciful designs. Who can this man be—coming at the very time when needed—but a *Boaz*, and he the father of blessings yet beyond the present hour?

Observe.—A man may be as a stranger to-day, and yet God may cause him to appear an angel of blessedness to-morrow. Despise nothing—hope in everything, and unite the actions of life by the spirit of cheerfulness. *If* Providence be a fact, trust in it!

J. P. Allen, M.A., on this:—Ruth ii. 19, *"Where hast thou gleaned to-day?"* —A simple question is sometimes startling, and is often stirringly suggestive.

I. The Sphere: Life's opportunities.

(1) The law of labour is the law of life. In this world but little can be accomplished without energy and enterprise. In every department this is true.

(2) To the open and eager eye openings invite and opportunities multiply. "Let me now go to the field." "I have set before thee an open door." "The field is the world." See Isa. vi. 8.

(3) Forms of activity, how diversified they are. There is not only the reaper but the "gleaner" also. "All works are good, and each is best when most it pleases Thee." "Gather up the fragments," and despise not "the day of small things."

(4) Scope exists for all. "How many serve, how many more may to the service come." "Even I, in fields so broad, some duties may fulfil."—*Woman's* work.

(5) Each "day" brings its demands. "To-day."

II. The Service: Our use or neglect of life's opportunities.

(1) Neglect possible. There is no compulsion. The parable of the talents. The field of the slothful (Prov. xxiv).

(2) Success attainable. Satisfaction in healthful industry. Beneficent results are an "ephah of barley." "Neither man nor work unblest wilt thou Thou permit to be." "He shall doubtless come again bringing his sheaves with him." "Enter into the joy of thy Lord."

(3) Co-operation here desirable. "Let fall some for her." "Reproach her not." Community in labour. Unselfishly thinking of others and their work, without unkindliness or rebuke. Cp. moroseness and malevolence. "Each worker pleases where the rest he serves in charity."

III. The Scrutiny: Direct investigation into our use of life's opportunities.

(1) The "day," however, varying in incident and duration, soon "goeth away." "The shadows of the evening are stretched out." "The night cometh when no man can work."

(2) After that, the Tribunal and award. (a) The Fact of Judgment [cf. Matt. xxv. 19.] (b) Its characteristics (1) *Personal and individual:* "Those." (2) *Practical:* "Where." (3) *Precise:* each "day" and its doings. How wise to let the inquiry here anticipate the inquiry hereafter. Day by day and every day should conscience put the question—"Where hast thou gleaned to-day?"

"If we are not our brethren's, yet surely we are our children's keepers; and we know what a son Adonijah proved, that had never been chidden. Parents should examine their children, not to frighten nor discourage them, not so as to make them hate home or tempt them to tell a lie, but to commend them if they have done well, and with mildness to reprove and caution them if they have done otherwise." —*Matthew Henry.*

"It is a good question for us to ask ourselves in the close of every day, 'Where have I gleaned to-day? What improvements have I made in knowledge and grace? What have I done or obtained that will turn to a good account?'"

"Sum up at night what thou hast done by day;
And in the morning what thou hast to do.
Dress and undress thy soul: mark the decay
And growth of it: if with thy watch, that too
Be down, then wind up both; since we shall be
Most surely judged, make thy accounts agree."
—*Herbert.*

"Spirits rest in duty, in the interchange of the communications and ministries of thought and love."—*Baldwin Brown.*

"The recording of these small matters showeth how dear to God are His saints, and how He is taken with everything they say or do, if not sinful."—*Trapp.*

"They are rich who have friends There is no living without friends."—*Portuguese Proverbs*

"And whether a man be poor or rich, caressed of fortune or crushed under difficulties, if he be homeless in this sense, if he have no loved ones caring *for him* and not for his substance, sympathizing in his trials and rejoicing in his successes, the veriest dog that has a kennel to creep in out of the cold wind at nights, is to be envied more than he."—B.

"Piety, however, does more than indulge in curiosity. The natural heart would have rejoiced, received, enjoyed, and inquired just as Naomi did, but withal with no thought except of self. She, on the contrary, before her inquiries are answered, induced simply by the abundance of the gifts and the manifest happiness of Ruth, blesses the giver."—*Lange.*

"The blessings of grace also are scattered abroad in the gospel field in the greatest abundance, but they must all be gathered in a diligent use of the appointed means. Sovereign grace could, if infinite wisdom saw meet, save its object without the intervention of means; and so might Boaz have given Ruth the handfuls unscattered, but he did not choose to do that, neither does grace choose to do this. God has therefore bound His people to as strict, as conscientious a use of the means, as if upon them only salvation was entirely dependent. . . . What He gives in a way of sovereign goodness must be gathered in the way of the strictest diligence."—*Macgowan.*

"If the rich can exchange their alms with the poor for blessings, they have no cause to complain of an ill bargain. Our gifts cannot be worth their faithful prayers: therefore it is better to give than receive; because he that receives hath a worthless alms: he that gives receives an invaluable blessing."—*Bishop Hall.*

"If we would but recollect that life is a mosaic, made up of very little things, and that the very smallest and meanest well done, is as thankworthy as the greatest."—*Anon.*

"Before even her question can be answered, and moved simply by the manifest happiness of Ruth in the abundance of her gleanings, she 'blesses' the man who has given her this happiness. For this she does not need to know who he is. Whoever had been kind and bountiful to Ruth must have meant to show that he appreciated her virtues and felt for her misfortunes."—*Cox.*

"'For the last ten years I (Gambetta) have made a pledge with myself to entirely avoid introducing the name of God into any speech of mine. You can hardly believe how difficult it has been, but I have succeeded, *thank God!*' (*'Dieu merci!'*). Thus the name so sternly tabooed rose unconsciously to his lips at the very moment when he was congratulating himself on having overcome the habit of using it."—*E. D. Pressense.*

VERSE 20.

Theme.—Kindness to the Living and the Dead.

"Those that he loved so long, and sees no more,
Loved and still loves—not dead, but gone before."—*Rogers.*

"The dead are like the stars by day,
Withdrawn from mortal eye,
Yet holding unperceived their way
Through the unclouded sky."—*Bernard.*

Blessed be he of the Lord [Jehovah] *who hath not left off His kindness to the living and the dead.*

It is just possible these words apply entirely to Boaz. New favours cause a fresh remembrance of former courtesies (*Fuller*). Memory is busy, and Naomi may see in the kindness of to-day only a continuance of similar acts to the dead Elimelech done years ago. If so, she recognises in this the habit and spirit of his life. The new benefactor is the benefactor of old. He "hath not left off," &c. Note. *Benevolence grows upon men.* One deed of charity leads to another, fosters the spirit, forms, or helps to form, the habit. Characteristic of a good man that he has not "left off" those deeds of kindness which bring down life-long blessings and benedictions upon him [cf. Job xxxi. 16-2; xxix. 11-16.] While some give from impulse merely, and others from ostentation, he gives from a heart permeated by the spirit of love, and so he is always ready to respond to

he wants of those around him. Note. *What a noble and spontaneous testimony to the worth of Boaz*, if the words are to be so employed and applied.

Again, the phrase is a very significant one as to the whole action and scope of the book. Among the Hebrews kindness to the widow, duties performed to and for the bereaved were looked upon as *done to and for the dead.* This one of the fixed ideas in Naomi's mind seemingly hopeless at first [see on i. 11-13; p. 46] as to any outward accomplishment, but now to be seen as beginning to shape itself in another way. Note. *There is a sense in which we may be kind to the dead*—to his memory, to his loved one [see on ch. i. 9, p. 40; Fuller's remarks.]

The very close relationship, however, between the name of Jehovah and the following sentence seems to intimate that it is the Divine Mercy as bestowed upon the living and the dead which is filling her heart with a gratitude not to be concealed [cf. Crit. and Exegetical Notes.] She thinks of God, not so much of Boaz as the author of this new kindness. It is, "Jehovah who hath not," &c. Note. Naomi recognizes this even more profoundly than Eliezer. (Gen. xxiv, 26.) (Lange.)

May be looked upon if taken in this way. **I. In the sense of the unbroken continuance of the Divine favour throughout the ages**, to children, and children's children. He is the God of Abraham *and* of Isaac, *and* of Jacob. He blesses Ruth to-day, even as He blessed her husband yesterday. To each new generation there is this revelation of new mercies, for He is the God of each "succeeding race." Men there are whose charitable deeds are as rare as an eclipse or a blazing star *(Fuller).* Not so with Him. He ceaseth not. "He hath not left off," &c.

Note. *The pious have recognised this in all ages.* Moses saw Him as, keeping covenant to a thousand generations (Deut. vii. 9) and as, "the dwelling-place" of His people in *all* generations (Ps. xc. 1). David conceived Him as keeping mercy for ever (Ps. lxxxix. 28), and as not suffering His "faithfulness to fail" (33). Isaiah speaks of Him as hearing and preserving and establishing His own (Is. xlix. 8). Jeremiah says, "His compassions fail not—they are new every morning" (Lam. iii. 22, 23). This unchanging faithfulness and compassion of God (1) *Comes from the Divine Nature* (Is. xlix.; 1 Cor. i. 9; 1 Thes. v. 24). (2) *Endures with the Divine existence* [cxlvi. 3]. (3) *Shows itself in the Divine action* **at all times.**

It may be looked upon **II. In that completer sense in which God controls the unseen world as well as this.** The dead are with Him even as the living are, and this thought may possibly have been in Naomi's mind. For how can mercy be shown to such as exist no longer? *(Lange).* Would never occur to speak of that as mercy [kindness] to the dead, which is mercy to the living and nothing more (*Ibid*). [See Critical and Exeg. Notes, and Lange in loco]. Certainly the dead held a very conspicuous and important place in Naomi's speech and thoughts [cf. i. 8. 21], as well as in that of the Hebrews generally [iv. 5. 10]. And can we imagine this as side by side with the conception that they had *ceased to exist* for ever? To do so is to commit the error of the Sadducees, who erred, "*not knowing the Scriptures.*" All the light of subsequent revelation has not made the dead one whit more real to us, more clearly identified with ourselves, than we see them here. Why, then, refuse to believe that Naomi saw her loved ones as resting even then in Abraham's bosom? Where otherwise is the force of Christ's appeal (Matt. xxii. 31, 32), "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living?"

Blessed thought if taught here! He comforts us to-day, and He comforts those who are no longer with us but with Him. Death has not removed them from the sphere of His kindness. Separation from us does not necessarily mean separation from Him; rather it means, with the righteous, to come more completely within the scope of His love (Rev. xiv. 13). They serve and we serve (Rev. vi. 15). He feeds them (17) and He feeds us. He strengthens the heart

of the mourners here, and He wipes away all tears from their eyes yonder. He hath not left off, etc. Note. *The dead and the living are linked together still in the eyes of God and of good men.* Not so much two worlds as one, that the other side of this and God over all blessed for evermore. Parted only by a thin and perhaps, from their side, transparent veil (*Braden*).

LESSONS. (1) Kindness to the living may be, and is sometimes, kindness to the dead. (2) As health is the poor man's patrimony, so prayers are the poor man's requital (*Trapp*).

Bernard on "*Blessed be he of the Lord.*" (1) That prayer in and by every true member of the Church hath been only made unto God. (2) That it is the Lord who doth bless and make happy. (3) That the Lord will bless the merciful. (4) That the poor's reward unto the rich for their work of charity is only their prayer to God for them.

E. Price on this:—God's Blessing. (1) *In its nature*, it is "kindness"—the very soul of tenderness to the God-fearing among men. (2) *In its continuance.* He can't "leave off" making His children happy. (3) *In its application* to both worlds—to the "living" as the song of a *Ruth* may testify; to the "dead," as the hope of a *Naomi* must imply. Both are in the covenant of the God of Israel. And (4) *in its expression.* He knows how to prepare some lip to give it adequate expression before the world. The old shall ever confirm the faith of the young.

"It is kindness to the dead as well as to the living. The natural human protectors are gone, but the Almighty Father has taken their place. It is what Elimelech and Mahlon would have desired, and it is kindness to them. Can we not imagine that those who have passed from earth, leaving poor disconsolate ones behind to struggle with life's difficulties, often find, in their glorified condition, fresh and continuous reasons for rejoicing, because they see how the ever-watchful love of God is constantly shown towards beloved ones, whose comfort was their desire and endeavour?"—*Braden.*

"Though old Barzillai be incapable of thy favours, let young Chimham taste of thy kindness. Though the dead cannot, need not, have thy mercy, yet may they receive thy kindness by a proxy—by their friends that still are living.

"Mercy, then to the dead, makes nothing for the Popish purgatory, and yet no wonder if the Papists fight for it. . . . In a word, were purgatory taken away, the Pope himself would be in purgatory, as not knowing which way to maintain his expensiveness."—*Fuller.*

"Call upon the Almighty, He will help thee; thou needest not perplex thyself about anything else: shut thy eyes, and while thou art asleep, God will change thy bad fortune into good."—*Arabian Nights.*

"The Lord is the fountain from whom all blessedness flows. Indeed, Jacob blessed his sons; Moses, the twelve tribes; the priests, in the law, the people: but these were but the instruments, God the Principal; these the pipe, God the Fountain; these the ministers to pronounce it, God the author who bestowed it."—*Fuller.*

"The dead. So silent now. Never to come back for us to touch imperfectness into riper good; never to charm away with pleasant thoughts the dull hours; never to fill with deeper meanings of love the half empty words; never to make more divine the common service of life; never to put the best interpretation upon conduct; never to lift the leaden crown of care from the anxious brow; never to help to transfigure the mean and lowly with heavenly hopes and aspirations. Gone! What a world of vacancy and silence and subtle mystery! Is it strange we should wish well to those who were kind to the dead? And Naomi links her own being with them still. . . . . With true hearts they can never be disassociated."—*Statham.*

"Oh, ye beloved ones!
Though speechless, though unseen,
Love's bond is strong to-day,
As love has ever been.
"Deathless the memories,
And though unspoken now;
Dear names and tender words,
Binding as lover's vow.
. . . . . .
"Tender and true ye were,
All passionless ye lie
Beneath the churchyard grass,
The weird wind wanders by.
. . . . . .
"We speak, the murmuring wind
Wanders earth-born above;
They rest below;—that calm,
Speaks God's best gift of love."—*B.*

"In the wonderful providence of God which made Ruth find a friend in Boaz, the rich relative of her husband, she feels herself justified to find an indication that God is once more gracious to her, and has not left off his kindness. If now it was through the fault of her dear departed ones that she had hitherto experienced distress, then it also follows that, since God's goodness again manifests itself so conspicuously, his anger against those must likewise be come to an end. For that reason she speaks of his kindness, not only to the

living but also of the dead. For these had died through the same sin which had brought suffering on herself. Hence, God's help to her in her suffering is a manifestation of His unwearied grace toward both the living and the dead."—*Lange.*

"If we would enter into the force of this outburst of praise, we must remember that Naomi had lost her faith—not in God, indeed, but in the goodwill of God for her. . . . Now she descries a proof that God had not wholly abandoned her. No one who has witnessed such a revulsion from spiritual despair to renewed hope in the Divine goodness and compassion will marvel at the ecstasy which breathes in Naomi's words."—*Cox.*

VERSES 20, 21.

Theme.—KINSHIP THE GROUND OF REDEMPTION.

"O God, O kinsman loved but not enough!
O man, with eyes majestic after death,
Whose feet have toiled along our pathways rough,
Whose lips drawn human breath!
By that one likeness which is ours and thine,
By that one nature which doth hold us kin;
By that high heaven where sinless Thou dost shine,
To draw us sinners in.
* * * * *
Come, lest this heart,"etc.—*Jean Ingelow.*

And Naomi said, the man is near of kin etc. . . . And Ruth said, He said unto me also, etc. . . . And Naomi said, it is good, my daughter, etc.

In this exquisite dialogue Ruth goes on, we can imagine, to relate and unfold at greater length than is here written the goodness of Boaz. She is evidently pleased to speak well of him and his. Then comes out in reply what has all along possibly been in the mind of Naomi. She had been no boaster of her rich friend and kinsman, as many, and that only to be disappointed at last. But the right moment for speech has arrived. It is not merely "by chance" that this Good Samaritan has come along. She sees that Providence has been playing its part in the unfolding of events, and the loneliness and bitterness of spirit which found expression in her cry, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara," is already a thing of the past. It is no casual helper who has come forward to relieve their necessities, but *one of the goelim.* "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen."

Notice I. That this nearness of kinship gives the right to redeem. (*a*) *A principle underlying the whole Jewish economy* to be seen alike in the patriarchial and Mosaic systems. Everything centred from the family centre. Kinship the very cement of their society.

The law has, however, a wider application, (*b*) *kinship is a natural and so a Divinely ordained institution.* The principle as true to-day as when laid hold of by Naomi. When kindred show themselves kind they only follow and satisfy the law of nature. The apostle says, "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. v. 8). So that men even standing aside from the claims of God, allow and respond to these claims.

Again (*c*). The law touches a deeper realm still, that of spiritual and eternal things. Christ Himself must conform to it when He came to redeem. (1) *There was a necessity for this,* a needs be. In all things "*it behoved Him* to be made like unto His brethren," says the apostle (Heb. ii. 16, 17). (2) *There was a reason for it.* Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself took part of the same, that through death He might destroy, &c., and deliver them who through fear of death, &c. Note. *Christ is the kinsman—Redeemer of all men.* [cf also on iii, 2, 4; iv, 9.]

II. This nearness of kinship points out and emphasises the direction in which to look for help. Naomi saw their safety secured by this intervention, their wants provided for, therefore she says in effect, "Cling to the deliverer thus providentially pointed out." So God often, and still opens up the path of safety and plenty in life (1) suddenly, (2) unexpectedly, (3), unmistakably.

"*It is good*," she says, immediately and prospectively. Usual both in the Old and New Testament to put the positive for the comparative in this kind. [Mary hath chosen the good part, *i.e.* the better part, Luke x. 42. It is profitable for thee; *i.e.* more profitable, Matt. v. 29] (*Fuller*). Note. God not only gives us providential directions, there are *special moments when He opens our eyes to see them as such.* Such a moment comes when the scales fall from our eyes and we see Jesus as our kinsman and our all (cf. Luke xxiv. 31; John xi. 40; 2 Kings vii. 7). It came to doubting Thomas, and he cried, "My Lord and my God."

Again, mark that just as natural affection, and the Levirate law alike, bound Boaz to render this help: they laid the obligation upon both Naomi and Ruth look to him for it. He had opened the way to aright relationship between them, and now there can be no excuse on their side. Note (1) *How exactly this illustrates Christ's position towards us.* He has taken the first step—given invitations which are unmistakable; now it is ours—under charge of the blackest ingratitude if we refuse—to respond. (2) *It is a discourtesy where we are beholden to alter our dependency (Bishop Hall).* Generosity dislikes to have its gifts slighted or its sincerity doubted (*Thomson*). Ruth evidently felt that because the kindness of Boaz was so great her obedience and dependence should be complete, while Naomi encouraged her thus to regard his orders as obligatory.

IMPROVEMENT. (1) Follow Providential guidances as they unfold in life. (2) Fall in with the natural and Divinely-appointed way of redemption. (3) May we not say that these words express the duty of the spiritual Ruth to labour in Christ's fields and believe steadfastly in Him, and not to stray from His presence into other fields even till the end of the world (*Wordsworth*).

"So suggestive is this figure, which was not a mere random selection, but an institution designed to foreshadow a great truth, that it is constantly referred to in the Word of God. We all recollect the touching case of Job. In the depth of his affliction, when all seemed desperate, he said, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' [Heb., 'My Goel liveth']."—*Dr. Cumming.*

"Christ came into our home, breathed our air, clad Himself in our dress, wept our tears, and was penetrated and pierced with more than all the accumulated sorrows that humanity is heir to, that we thus—there being no other process in the world besides—might be rescued from our sins, and might hear, ringing in the depths of our hearts, with the opening of the prison doors to the captive, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.'"—*Dr. Cumming.*

"I have seen the twine-thread of a cordial friend hold, when the cable-rope of a rich kinsman hath broken. Let those therefore be thankful to God, to whom God hath given means to be maintained of themselves, without dependance on their kindred. Better it is to be the weakest of substances to subsist of themselves, than to be the bravest accidents to be maintained by another."—*Fuller.*

"Our blessed Saviour is our Goel; it is He that hath a right to redeem. If we expect to receive benefit by him, let us closely adhere to Him, and His fields, and His family; let us not go to the world and its fields for that which is to be had with Him only, and which He has encouraged us to expect from Him. Has the Lord dealt bountifully with us? Let us not be found in any other field, nor seek for happiness and satisfaction in the creature. Tradesmen take it ill if those that are in their books go to another shop. We lose Divine favours if we slight them."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Even the lump of clay, when it was placed near the rose, according to the beautiful Persian proverb, caught some of its fragrance. It is the direction of Him in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, 'Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents.'"—*A. Thomson, D.D.*

VERSE 23.

***Theme.*—Constancy at Home and Abroad.**

"Man to thy labour bow,
Thrust in the sickle now,
Reap where thou once did plough—
God sends thee bread."—*Montgomery.*

"Home to calmer bliss invites,
More tranquil and more true."—*Bowring.*

So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end, etc. And dwelt with her mother-in-law.

The homely history repeats and re-repeats this idea of keeping fast by, etc. The wandering sheep never thrives (*Thomson*). Wisdom to prevent danger by not exposing ourselves to peril (*Bernard*). Naomi has wisely and affectionately warned her against the danger of going elsewhere (v. 22). Boaz, too, has spoken to the same end (v. 8, 21). Here we see the good counsel (*a*) thankfully accepted, (*b*) carefully followed [cf. Prov. xiii. 20].

Note. *Ruth an example to the young* in this—obedient, scrupulously attentive in carrying out the advice which has been given. Even Ishmael obeyed his mother in matters of moment (Gen. xxi. 21), and Herodias first consulted her mother before she asked a boon of her father Herod (Matt. xiv, 7, 8,). In this respect they condemn many undutiful children of our days (*Fuller*).

Labour and rest go a long way to make up life. Here is constancy in both.

Notice I. The commendable constancy and continuity in connexion with labour enforced here. Harvest prospects naturally (1) reconcile to exertion, (2) animate to diligence, (3) stimulate to constant and continual toil. Whether as gleaners or reapers we should respond to the appeal. Ruth evidently laboured as one who felt that the present gracious season of ingathering would not last for long. Blayed the ant and not the grasshopper (*Bernard*). A few days or weeks, and it would be all over—its opportunities gone for ever. Reasonable, therefore, that every other concern should give place to this, and that every exertion should be made to improve the short, but all-important, period.

How true the principle in other directions! (*a*) *So with life itself*—fleeting—once ours, then gone for ever. (*b*) *So with gospel opportunities.* The season for repentance and the ingathering of faith (1) limited, (2) short, (3) uncertain in duration. Hence the wisdom of improving the present opportunity. To-day if ye will hear His voice, etc. (Heb. iv. 7). He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame (Prov. x. 5). Note. *The best thrift is to use the present opportunity.*

Again, Ruth laboured until the end of the barley and wheat harvest—a double chance, and no part of it neglected. There are who at first have a ravenous appetite to work, but quickly surfeit thereof (*Fuller*). So in spiritual things many who begin well, as Orpah did, (I. 14) (cf. Gal. iii. 3; iv. 9; Matt. xiii. 5, 6, etc.) Note. (*a*) *The constant pace goes farthest and is freest from being tired* (*Fuller*). (*b*) *He that endures unto the end is to be saved* (Matt. xxiv 13) (*c*) *Opportunities neglected are not likely to return again.* How solemn the responsibility, then, of this present! lest we should be found saying, "The harvest is past," etc. (Jer. viii. 20).

Notice II. The commendable constancy and continuity in connection with home and rest enforced here. And she dwelt with her mother-in-law (1) *Shows her discretion.* She constantly came home to her mother at night as became a virtuous woman, that was for working days, and not for merry nights (*Matt. Henry*); (2) *Shows her affection for Naomi.* No favour abroad, or gain reaped there, made her neglect the friend with whom she had come from Moab. Clinging fast to her new acquaintances in the harvest-field did not interfere with

"cleaving to Naomi" at home. A lesson and an example to the inconstant here. Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy ways [cf. on I. i. p. 11]? (3) *Shews her love for home.* Had what so many men in these days want, a centre for her duties and affections, and was true to that—fixed—not given to change. Christ's command to his disciples "go not from house to house;" enforces this in connection with the interests and spread of his kingdom (Matt. x. 16). Note. (*a*) *Children are to cling to home so long as they may be of use there.* How can they show their gratitude for the past better than as Ruth did by affection and care in the present? (*b*) *Change apart from God's guidance is always a foolish thing.*

IMPROVEMENT.—An interesting *illustration* of youthful fidelity in the Saviour's work (Tyng). Such fidelity makes its distinct and decided choice. The aim single, the pursuit absorbing. "This one thing I do," said Paul. *Suggest* (1) that every one should have his chosen field in which to gather instruction; (2) And that having chosen it he ought to keep to it (*Thomson*). Wandering may very possibly lead on to dangerous ground. (3) The necessity there is for the "home life"—(*a*) guard it, (*b*) cherish it. Go forth to work, come home to live (*Baldwin Brown*). Note. *Home and heaven are kindred spheres* (*Ibid.*).

"Maids are the fittest company for maids; amongst whom a chaste widow, such as Ruth was, may well be recounted. Modesty is the life-guard of chastity."—*Fuller*

"Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land, and we know what a disgrace her vanity ended in. Ruth kept at home, and helped to maintain her mother, and went out on no other errand than to get provision for her, and we shall find afterwards what preferment her humility and industry ended in. Seest thou a man diligent in his business? Honour is before him."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Perhaps some will say, that Christ willeth us not to take care. But doth He ever will any man not to labour? The care which Christ speaketh of, is immoderate care, care without faith, or care full of doubting, and little faith, and that which is without care of religion, the mind being taken up wholly with the world; else men may, yea, and ought to labour for the things of this life to be provident for the time to come, and frugal in expenses for the time present."—*Bernard.*

"It was Christ's counsel to His disciples, (Matt. x. ii.) to "abide" in the place wherein they did enter, and not to go from house to house. Such the settledness of Ruth,—where she first fastened, there she fixed; she "dwelt with her mother." Naomi affords Ruth house room, Ruth gains Naomi food; Naomi provides a mansion, Ruth prays for meat; and so [they] mutually serve to supply the wants of each other. If envy, and covetousness, and idleness were not the hindrances, how might one Christian reciprocally be a help unto another! All have something, none have all things; yet all might have all things in comfortable and competent proportion, if seriously suiting themselves as Ruth and Naomi did, that what is defective in one might be supplied in the other."—*Fuller.*

"This Ruth the Moabitess, a heathen by birth, may rise up in judgment against such as should be natural children, who having gotten from under their parents, when they can live of themselves, they make no reckoning of them being altogether unwilling to live with them, and most of all to relieve them."—*Bernard.*

The Saviour's field is perfectly distinct. . . . We can never doubt what positive and true religion is in the human character, or what it requires of us; our questions are never on the side of things which are certainly right, but on the side of those which are possibly wrong. In such cases there can be no question that it is right to abstain from that which is not perfectly free from doubt in its indulgence. Happy is it for the young christian to take a decided, positive standard of conduct; and in all things to seek and to pursue that which is manifestly good to the use of edifying, and adapted to minister to a growth in grace, and a real likeness to a holy Master. Such will avoid the scenes and instruments of temptation. "It is good that they meet thee not in any other field."—*Tyng.*

"She stood breast high amid the corn,
Clasped by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won
"On her cheeks an autumn flush
Deeply ripened—such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.
"Round dark eyes her tresses fell,
Which were blackest none could tell,
But long lashes veiled a light
That had else been all too bright.
"And her hat with shady brim,
Made her tressy forehead dim;
Thus she stood amid the stocks,
Praising God with sweetest looks.
"'Sure,' I said, 'Heaven did not mean
Where I reap thou should'st but glean
Lay thy sheaf adown and come,
Share my harvest and my home.'"

Thomas Hood.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLAIMANT IN THE THRESHING FLOOR.

CONTENTS.—*Ruth, at the instigation of Naomi, by laying herself down at the feet of Boaz claims an acknowledgment of the relationship between them. He explains to her that there is a nearer kinsman than himself, but promises to undertake the duties of a goel [redeemer] should the prior claim not be insisted upon. He dismisses her with a present, and she returns to Naomi to await the issue.*

VERSES 1—6.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—**Then [and] Naomi . . said.** The plan had matured itself slowly in her mind during the harvest season, now comes the proposal. Boaz, by his kindness and attention to Ruth, has evidently removed whatever difficulties she has felt heretofore [cf. on i. 11-13: p. 47]. **Shall I not seek?** I must seek rest for thee. הֲלֹא as usual an expression of general admission or of undoubted certainty, in the sense of "Is it not true I seek for thee?" It is my duty to seek for thee (*Keil*). The obligation to enforce the claims of a Levirate marriage lay on the side of Naomi and Ruth. In accordance with ancient usage to leave the assertion of a right with its possessor (*Lange*), the widow could demand her rights of the nearest relative, and if refused, put him openly to shame (*Ibid*). **Rest** [a resting place, Num. x. 33] **for thee.** A secure life, under the guardian care of a husband (*Rosenmuller*) Cf. on i. 9 as to this "rest in the house of a husband;" with the respect and protection it implied. That which made the fate of the daughter of Jephthah so sad was, that she never found a resting place in the house of a husband (*Lange*). That it may be well with thee. Which shall be good for thee (*Carpzov Rosen.*) That marriage may be to thee a merry-age (*Trapp*). She assumed that every true rest was good (*Morison.*)

Ver. 2. **And now is not Boaz of our kindred?** Our relation (*Keil*). Our acquaintance, *i.e.*, relative (*Lange*). Hence the justness of the claim. Is he not therefore thy husband according to the law (*Wordsworth*). Cannot reasonably suppose that a pious woman would counsel against the law of God or the moral sense of good men, such as Boaz. To do so, would have alienated and repelled him, and so have frustrated her own purpose (*Ibid*). **With whose maidens thou wast.** A delicate reminder that Boaz has himself placed her on a level with his own Israelitish people [cf. on v. 13, 14]. **Behold he winnoweth barley to-night.** Naomi must have come into closer connection with her relative. She is minutely informed of what he does, and where he is (*Lange*). The claim which Ruth had to make, could hardly be urged by her publicly in the harvest field, in the light of day (*Wordsworth*). He winnoweth barley. Literally, he is winnowing the threshing-floor of barley. He is winnowing the barley floor (barley on the threshing-floor) (*Keil*). Performed by tossing up the grain against the wind with a fork (Jer. iv. 11, 12). Shows the simple manners of the times. This "mighty man of wealth" assisted personally (*Speakers's Com.*). It is not unusual for the husband, wife, and all the family, to encamp at the *baiders*, or threshing-floors, until the harvest is over (*Dr. Thomson*). **o night.** Chosen for the advantage of the breeze which blew then (Gen. iii. 8). In the night wind (*Targum*). Much agricultural labour of various kinds performed on bright nights (*Kitto*). **In the threshing-floor.** Nothing more than a level place in the field, under the open heavens (*Keil*). Constructed of a circular form, perhaps 50 feet in diameter, merely by beating down the earth hard (*Robinson*) [cf. Thomson ii. 314]. Both the threshing and winnowing are done in the open air, rain in harvest time being almost unknown (*Wordsworth*) [cf. Judges vi. 37; ▪ Sam. vi. 6.]

Ver. 3. **Wash thyself therefore and anoint thee.** Not done in order to win Boaz by external beauty; for she is especially cautioned against allowing him to see her by day (*Lange*). Yet she is to go as a bride adorned for her husband, appropriately and symbolically dressed. **And put thy [best] raiment upon thee.** And ornament thyself with thy garments (*Syr. Arab*). Use all lawful means to ingratiate (*Trapp*). **And get thee down to the floor.** Bethlehem situated on a hill (*Stanley*), c.f. on ii. 4; p. 101. Serve God's providence by demanding marriage of him, which in those days, and in Ruth's case, was neither unlawful nor immodest (*Trapp*). *Consilium hoc est re legitimum specie inhonestum* (*Junius*). Nothing in these directions which was considered improper under the special and peculiar circumstances of the case (*Kitto*). This was a bold expedient, but it must be remembered that it was undertaken at the instigation of an aged and pious woman, and simply to remind Boaz of the relative positions in which they stood to each other. **Make not thyself known unto.** Suffer not thyself to be perceived by (*Lange*). The grain heaps probably surrounded the threshing floor, and would offer a chance for concealment, even though the place itself was under the open heavens **Until he shall have done eating and drinking.** Until the moment of leisure and ease. Men more disposed to listen attentively then.

Ver. 4. Thou shalt mark. For the sake of finding it in the darkness coming on. **And uncover his feet.** Rather the place of his feet, the foot of his bed, as we should say (*Sp. Com*). Sleep at his feet (*Syr. Arab*). Boaz probably slept under a rug, sheep skin, or thick quilt, and was covered with another, or by his cloak (*Kitto*). In Palestine men lay down with their clothes on, but are careful to cover their feet with a long mantle now called the Chudda, a wrapper of coarse cloth (*Postans*). All that thou sayest. Her consent that of faith and obedience, the conduct of one conscious of her own purity of purpose, and willing to encounter suspicion in the exercise of duty (*Wordsworth*). Unto me. Omit (*Cassel, Bertheau, Bellamy, &c.*) I will do. Evident that inclination, judgment, and all that she had seen of Boaz came in to enforce Namoi's advice. His age and his character probably shrinking and diffident, yet pious and honourable, encouraged her in obedience.

Ver. 6. And she went down unto the floor. Probably while it was yet light.

VERSE 1.

Theme.—ONE SEEKING REST FOR ANOTHER.

"As if with marriage came the end,
The entrance into settled rest,
The calm to which love's tossings tend,
The quiet rest."—*Jean Ingelow.*

"Whatever hypocrites austerely talk
Of purity, and place, and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all,
Our Maker bids increase."—*Milton.*

Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?

All Scripture given by inspiration of God and *profitable* (2. Tim. iii. 10). That is when rightly understood and intrepreted. Some passages however peculiarly liable to misunderstanding (*Thomson*). Divine ways often strange at first sight, and seemingly unsatisfactory to first judgments. We have to look at them as a whole before we can see them aright. So with the Divine Word. Parts which a false delicacy would expunge and which would never have appeared had the Bible been a merely human book. To understand them aright you must look (*a*) at their scope, (*b*) at the motive (*c*) at the underlying principle. Theend aimed at right, the spirit which prompts the aim right, rest assured that the means employed will fall under the same great law. This true (1) of the Divine doings however mysterious, (2) of the doings of all who are truly led of Him.

See how this is illustrated here. I. Naomi's motive is right. (1) *Justice to the dead.* The law of Israel was that no branch of the family tree should be allowed to become extinct. The dead Mahlon had claims upon Boaz, and only the fact that Ruth was of Moab, had prevented these claims being enforced earlier. At first the claim seemed a hopeless one (I. 11-13). Now thanks to the kindness of Boaz, Naomi sees light beginning to break in upon their gloomy prospects. (2) *Justice to the living.* Not merely kindness to Ruth and not merely gratitude, although these motives must have moved Naomi powerfully, but a deeper feeling —that instinctive sense of right, which overleaps such petty boundaries as nationalities. Her feelings as an Israelite, exclusive, conservative, unyielding may find expression I. 9-14; now comes out the deeper feelings of a woman and a mother. Hence her wisdom projected for her daughter, that which her daughter's modesty forbade her to project for herself.

Anxiety, solicitude for the settlement of a daughter pardonable, even commendable, so that modesty be not overstepped. Naomi of the same opinion as Paul as to the true sphere of woman: "I desire therefore that the younger widows marry," &c. (1 Tim. v. 14). Too old to marry herself, she by no means placed the same restriction upon those younger than herself. Such prudery is often only disguised selfishness and callousness of heart. Note *Age must not make itself a standard for youth.* Naomi's care without doubt commendable and recorded for imitation (*M. Henry*). Analagous to the conduct of a gospel church. Jerusalem always tender towards her daughters (*Macgowan*).

II. Naomi's principle is right. That one may seek rest for another—that one

may, and ought to forward the well-being of others the essential principle of the gospel itself (Luke xix. 10). So Christ sought not his own (John v. 30; viii. 28; viii. 50). So charity seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. xiii. 5). So Paul "not seeking mine own profit," he says, "but the profit of many" (1 Cor. x. 33). Note. *Bearing one another's burdens we "fulfil" the law of Christ* (Gal. vi. 2; 1 Cor. x. 24; Phil. ii. 20, 21).

Again, could Naomi do otherwise for one so near and dear as Ruth. She fulfils *not only a religious but a natural duty.* The young have claims upon the aged, upon their experience, foresight, judgment, &c. As wrong to withhold these, as to withhold more natural and apparent benefits. Eli doubtless gave his children bread, but seems to have withheld instruction, direction, reproof, restraint, and so came under the anger of God (James iii. 12, 13). Note. *Few greater responsibilities in life than this of providing for the future well-being of children.* "Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee"—the burden of many a parent's heart and prayers.

Once more mark the kind of "rest" Naomi sought for Ruth—home rest, household well-being, that which is the purest of earth's pleasures and the foretaste of heaven's joys. Note. *The inspired idea of marriage is, that it is and ought to be "a rest."* "Not good for man to be alone" (Gen. ii. 18), much less woman, naturally weaker and more defenceless than man: still less a stranger like Ruth. [cf. on i. 9; p. 36.] With regard to woman marriage was viewed as the natural fulfilment of her calling, without which her life was helpless and defenceless as that of a people without a God (*Lange*).

The principle true to-day. Where love, patience, unselfishness, &c. are found; married life as much like "rest" as can be discovered in this world (*Braden*). Of course, cares, anxieties, difficulties are to be expected. As it is said of Egypt no country hath more venomous creatures, none more antidotes; so marriage hath many troubles, but withal many keeps against trouble (*Trapp*). Note. *Those are giddy indeed that marriage does not compose* (*M. Henry*).

Naomi's plan is right—judged by the time and circumstances. Involved no impropriety (*Binney*). The face, the worst piece of it, the heart was sound (*Bishop Hall.*) Certainly it was a bold expedient but not necessarily the worse because of that. She knew the piety and chastity of Boaz and Ruth (*Trapp*). The customs of the age and country were simpler, freer, but not less pure than the more formal customs of our own land and age (*Braden*).

Dr. Thomson and others however only vindicate the intentions, while they censure the measures, acquit of designing evil, but blame Naomi for not "abstaining from all *appearance* of evil." Too much cunning and stratagem, and forcing of Providence about the whole transaction (*Thomson*). Ran the hazard of sacrificing a good name in the use of a too bold and perilous artifice (*Ibid*). Note. *Every action that is reported is not straightway* allowed (*Bishop Hall*). If every act of a holy person should be our rule, we should have crooked lives (*Ibid*).

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) *Rest a natural desire* of all men. David would flee away into the wilderness, leave the city and camp far behind, and be at rest (Ps. lv. 6). Take the broad sense of the word and this is what all men are seeking. *Recognised by Christ as a necessity.* "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile (Mark vi. 31). *This desire satisfied in Christ* (Matt. xi. 28, 29; Heb. iv. 3. We which have believed, &c). Note. *Rest is a thing to be sought.*

(2) *Thoughtful love a common thing* in human history. We cannot always be with those who are dear to us—we may provide for their welfare, however, in that future when we are with them no longer. Bernard on this:—

Shall I not seek. It is the parents' duty to provide matches for their children. So did God, the general Father, for His son Adam, Abraham for Isaac, Isaac for Jacob. Samson entreated his father and mother to get him a wife (Judges xiv. 1, 2).

Rest for thee. So she called the married estate. The word is "a place of rest" to settle in. Note. *The married estate is an estate of rest.*

That it may be well with thee. Marriage is for the well-being of such as enter

into the holy estate. Doth not God say, "It is not good for man to be alone"? It is the estate in which the holiest have lived, and in which Christ Himself would be born. St. Paul indeed commended single life, but not simply but with respect unto the then present times, full of troubles and persecutions.

While the women are in distress it is Ruth who takes the initiative [ch. ii. 2.]; now, when hope grows large, it is Naomi. When hardship was to be endured, the mother submitted her will to the daughter—for Ruth was not sent to glean, she went of her own accord; now, when the endeavour is to secure the joy and happiness held out in prospect, the daughter yields in all things to the direction of the mother. The thought of labour for the mother originates with the daughter; but it is the mother who forms plans of happiness for the daughter.—*Lange.*

Luck is ever waiting for something to turn up. Labour, with keen eyes and strong will, will turn up something. Luck lies in bed, and wishes the postman would bring him the news of a legacy. Labour turns out at six o'clock, and, with busy pen or ringing hammer, lays the foundation of a competence. Luck whines. Labour whistles. Luck relies on chance. Labour on character.—*Cobden.*

This word "menuchah" is used in many weighty sentences in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is used to designate the asylum of honour and freedom which a Hebrew found in the home of her husband, her secure refuge from servitude, insolence, and neglect. It is also used to denote the asylum of freedom and repose on which the Hebrew race entered when it gained full possession of the promised land, when in the days of Solomon, every man might sit under his vine or his fig tree, none daring to make him afraid. It was used by the Prophets in a still higher sense; with them God was the true menuchah or rest of His people, nay, of the whole world; to them it was revealed that only when the Immanuel came, the God-with-us, would the golden days of Paradise return; and the world enter into its final and glorious rest. So that those who first listened to our Saviour's gracious invitation (Matt. xi. 28-30), those on whose weary and fevered spirits His promise of "rest" first fell, would understand that He was offering them an asylum of repose, honour, and freedom, such as the Hebrew wife found in her husband's house, such as the Hebrew race found in the sacred land when it was wholly their own, such as the Hebrew Prophets had found in God in the moments of their loftiest aspirations.—*Cox.*

This is Naomi's conception of wedded life. Very beautiful, but how many realise it in their experience? Have we not heard multitudes of people declare that marriage was the real beginning of their troubles? Then anxiety about providing and regulating a household has commenced; then business and domestic cares have taken away all expected pleasure; then tempers are tried as never before; then disputes and bickerings arise that destroy all peace; then the beautiful illusions of youth have given place to the hard and stern practicalities of maturing life.—*Braden.*

The estate of holy matrimony is well called a state of rest, for the natural affections and propensities instinctively yearn for it, and in it alone find their lawful gratification. The Rabbin's say: "The man is restless while he misses the rib that was taken out of his side; and the woman is restless till she gets under the man's arm, from whence she was taken."—*Steele and Terry.*

"I, as a Protestant have been accustomed to assert the purity and dignity of the offices of husband, wife, and parent. Have I ever examined the grounds of my own assertion? Do I believe them to be as callings from God, spiritual, sacramental, divine, eternal? Or am I at heart regarding and using them, like the Papist, merely as heaven's indulgences to the infirmities of fallen man?" . . . . Those miserable dilettanti, who in books and sermons are whimpering meagre secondhand praise of celibacy, depreciating as carnal and degrading those family ties to which they owe their own existences, and in the enjoyment of which they themselves all the while unblushingly indulge—insulting thus their own wives and mothers—nibbling ignorantly at the very root of that household purity which constitutes the distinctive superiority of Protestant over Popish nations"—*Kingsley.*

Christianity, be it remembered, proposes not to extinguish our natural desires, but to bring them under just control and direct them to their true objects.—*Wilberforce.*

VERSES 2—4.

Theme.—AN IMPORTANT REMINDER.

"The grey old man was honoured there,
The matron's words were cherished,
And honesty in youthful hearts
By age's word was nourished."—*Nichol.*

(2) *Is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast?* Naomi has laid hold of the fact that they are entitled to use a certain amount of freedom in the affair—(1) because of kinship; (2) because of the kindness Boaz has already shown to Ruth. The allowing Ruth to glean under especially favourable circumstance [see on ii. 8, 13—16] not without a meaning. Note. *We more readily ask*

favours from those who have already shown us kindness. In the nature of such to grow and become the foundation of our future actions.

I. An encouraging reminder. We need to put each other in mind, as well as recall to our own memories the thought of our claims and privileges. Naturally (1) apt to forget; (2) apt to delay action even when remembering; (3) apt to remember and yet not realize. "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things," says the Apostle Peter, "*though ye know them.*" This a favourite idea of the Apostle's in his old age [cf. 2 Peter i. 12, 13, 15; iii. 1, &c.]. So Paul writing to Timothy [1 Tim. iv. 6; 2 Tim. i. 3, 6; ii. 14].

II. An implied argument, viz., that he is bound in conscience to take care of our affairs (M. Henry). *Is he not our kinsman?* How much a kindred question implies to the believer in Christ's proper humanity. (1) Can we fear to approach? (2) Can we do other than expect a welcome? [On the Kinsman Redeemer, see iv. 9, 10; ii, 20, 21].

III. A duty beginning to unfold itself. Why not bring the claim to the notice of Boaz? The obligation lay upon them to take initiative [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes]. Time and place, both opportune now that the harvest is ending. Note. *A well-chosen season is one of the best advantages of any action* (*Trapp*).

So in spiritual things we must seek, knock, ask, &c. In one sense Christ woos, in another He waits to be wooed. No presumption in seeking his feet.

> "From labour health, from health contentment springs,
> Contentment opes the source of every joy."—*Beattie.*

Verse 2. *Behold he winnoweth, &c.*

Not ashamed to do this himself—lived in the days of ancient simplicity (*Lawson*). *Not too idle* to deny himself of sleep that it might be done properly—a model farmer [cf. on ii. 2, 4, p. 93, 100].

See here, I. Work associated with the character and position of a gentleman. Boaz was this, yet he labours with his own hands. Modern refinements and etiquette give no more pleasure to the fashionable gentleman than honest industry gave to this grandson of a famous prince (*Lawson*). Camillus, Fabricius, and other famous Roman consuls held the plough. Edmund Burke, in the very height of his fame, farmed his own lands near Beaconsfield. Note. (*a*) *Labour the law of God* (Gen. ii. 15; iii. 19). All are to work, some with hand, some with brain. (*b*) *A false pride that dislikes handwork* (*Radford Thomson*).

II. Work associated with the character and position of a man of God. The claims of the higher life do not exempt us from the calls and cares of the lower. Christ Himself doubtless laboured in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. And it was while doing so that it was written of Him that He "increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man."

Verse 3. *Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee.* Ruth must seek to make herself attractive; even though the coming interview is to be in the dark—a duty always. Preparation necessary even for a duty like this. Note. *Cleanliness enforced in the Scriptures as well as godliness;* comes down to the lowest duties of life. Much that inspiration takes notice of, which men count mean and unworthy of attention. These trifling details, however correct from an artistic point of view, heighten the effect of the whole picture, suggest the truthfulness of the narrative, &c.

IMPROVEMENT.—(1) The Bride of Christ is pleasing to her Bridegroom only when anointed with the Spirit and clothed in the garments of salvation (*Starke*). (2) We may use all lawful means to ingratiate, &c., if our purpose be right. If decency of apparel is not a virtue, slovenliness is at least an approach to vice (*Lawson*).

Bernard on this (condensed):—

A true friend is not in show only, or in well wishes, but in devising how to bring to pass what they desire. So Jonathan with David (1 Sam. xix. 2, 3; xx.

12, 13), Abraham with Lot (Gen. xiv.) Note. Godly parents seek to match their children where God alloweth. Naomi's ground was the law of God, as she thought.

Behold he winnoweth barley to-night. See and consider the providence of God! It is as one would wish, it falleth out opportunely. Warrant from God, experience of the love of man, and fit occasion to effect a matter, are strong inducements to attempt the same. So Esther going in unto Ahasuerus (Esth. v. 1—8). Note. It is no unseemliness for men of birth, of place, of wealth, sometime to follow in their own person mean labours of their calling.

Verse 3. *Wash thyself, therefore.* Outward cleanliness is praiseworthy. Our Christian profession is pure and holy, which outward cleanliness well befitteth. And seeing it is of good report, we are to observe it. *And anoint thee.* Christians may lawfully use God's creatures for outward comeliness, and to preserve that seemliness which is God's own work in us (Psalm cxiv. 15). *And put thy raiment upon thee.* Touching this necessity of wearing apparel, nature teacheth it, and need enforceth it.

Get thee down to the floor. The widow woman allowed by the law of Moses to claim marriage of the next kinsman. No more immodest for women to claim that right then, than now for one betrothed to challenge the man for her husband. Where God alloweth the thing it taketh away the scandal and the offence. *But make not thyself known to the man until he shall have done eating and drinking.* Men are more apt to speak freely then and to promise their goodwill than at other times. Note. Her mind must be showed in private, and to him alone. The night and in private make modest persons utter more freely their thoughts than otherwise they would in the light and before company.

When he lieth down. Rest follows after labour, and the night is appointed for the same. So the Psalmist teaches (civ. 13), and Jacob practised (Gen. xviii. 2). This the right use of time.

Thou shalt mark the place. Careful observation prevents error. Shows also that in those times they had no set place to lie down.

Uncover his feet. Aims at making Ruth his yokefellow, yet teaches her to proceed in humility, to go to his feet. Note. *Humility not any hindrance, but the way to advancement.*

"Let us look into providences; surely they mean somewhat. They hang so together; have been so constant, so clear, so unclouded."—*Cromwell.*

"Perhaps the assurance, which long trial has given her of the good government and firm chastity of her daughter-in-law, together with her persuasion of the religious gravity of Boaz, made her think that design safe, which to others had been perilous, if not desperate. But besides that, holding Boaz next of blood to Elimelech, she made account of him as the lawful husband of Ruth; so as there wanted nothing but a challenge of a consummation, nothing was abated but some outward solemnities, which though expedient for the satisfaction of others, yet were not essential to marriage; and if there were not these colours for a project so suspicious, it would not follow that the action were warrantable because Naomi's. Why should her example be more safe in this than in matching her sons with infidels, than in sending back Orpah to her father's gods."—*Bishop Hall.*

"Labour is the law of man's life, in contrast to the creatures. Because man became a sinner and God cursed him with it, says a large school of theologians. Because man was a child of God, and the Father worketh hitherto, and the Son also worketh, say others, and, I think, wiser and more far-sighted men. These daily tasks are the dignity and glory of our nature, as sons under discipline."—*Baldwin Brown.*

"Naomi's solicitude for her devoted daughter-in-law is beautiful and motherly. But the form into which it ran and took shape can never recur in the midst of the culture and customs of European society. Even the method of winnowing the golden grains of the harvest field is antique and obsolete. So, too, is the method which Boaz adopted to watch over his cereal treasures. He constituted himself his own watchman and policeman."—*Pulpit Com.*

"Ruth was directed to pay special attention to the adornments of her person, to which, to this extent at least, she had been a stranger since the death of her husband. She is to lay aside the weeds of mourning and the garments of toil, and, after bathing and anointing, don the festive garb, for the expedition on which she goes is of a joyous, bridal nature. All this, however, is not done in order to win Boaz by external beauty, for she is specially cautioned against allowing him to see her by day. But why this caution? Boaz was a

believing Israelite, and therefore also a man of strict morals. It would have perplexed and displeased him to think that anybody else had seen Ruth, and might suspect both her and himself of an illicit meeting on the solitary threshing-floor. He would have scarcely listened to her, but removed her at once. The purpose for which she came had also an appropriate symbolism which any previous meeting would have disturbed."—*Lange.*

"The church must put on her best attire when she comes to Christ. She is brought to the King in raiments of needlework, in the Psalms (xiv. 14); she puts on her beautiful garments, in Isaiah (lii. 1); she is adorned as a bride for her husband in raiment pure and white, in the Apocalypse (Rev. xxi. 2)."—*Wordsworth.*

"She was to discover nothing of her intention to Boaz when she went to the feast, but rather to avoid any particular notice, that he might entertain no suspicion of what was to follow. Concealment of intentions may be very proper and very consistent with uprightness in some cases. But we must beware of doing anything that will not bear the light, or using those arts of concealment in transacting lawful affairs that may be attended with bad effects upon our character. It was perfectly consistent with uprightness in Samuel to conceal his chief intention when he came to Bethlehem to anoint David; and in Solomon, when he commanded a sword to be brought and his guards to slay the living child about which the two harlots contended."—*Lawson.*

"Seek him in private when no eye but that of heaven is upon thee; come secretly to his feet, and lay thy helpless, desolate state open before his seat of mercy; freely confess the baseness of thine original; he will not despise thee on acconnt of the hole of the pit from whence thou wast digged."—*Macgowan.*

VERSES 5, 6.

Theme.—OBEDIENCE IN INNOCENCE.

"Age, by long experience well informed,
. . . . . .
As time improves the grapes authentic juice
Mellows and makes the speech more fit for use,
And claims a reverence in its shortening day,
That 'tis an honour and a joy to pay."

All that thou sayest unto me I will do. And she went, etc.

Ruth once more a model of filial obedience, and that when called upon to discharge a difficult and delicate mission, one which must have been trying to her modesty as a woman. She errs, if at all, by excess of complaisance. The errors of young people are commonly of an opposite kind (*Lawson*).

If anyone is to be blamed it must be Naomi. Her acquaintance with the laws and customs of Israel are her defence. Ruth, as a foreigner, was dependent upon her for instruction in these things. She obeys, although she might very naturally shrink from the task. Gratitude, respect for Naomi, as well as reason led her. Goes freely and without fear. Hesitates not, doubts not.

Three things exemplified and enforced here—

I. Humble trustfulness on the part of the young. (1) On the lowest ground *a duty.* (2) On higher ground to be cultivated as *a virtue.* (3) On highest, as its own reward, *a pleasure.* The sequel proves that this obedience of Ruth was not tempting Providence—rather it was acting upon faith. The trust that has brought her so far sustains her now. Goes with unshrinking confidence.

II. Deference to the opinions and judgment of the aged. An important lesson. Note. *These more likely to be correct than those of the young.* More experienced.

III. That cheerful compliance which adds grace to obedience. The way we obey is something as well as the act itself [cf. on i. 10, p. 44, *Macgowan*].

Note. (*a*) *Ruth not only promised but performed.* Contrasts with many who say, and do not; or who will not say, and yet do. More, (*b*) *she carries out her obedience to the slightest details of the project.* "All that thou sayest I will do." How important is this that obedience should be thorough [through out]. The

fortune of things of the greatest importance often hangs upon the doing or leaving undone a thing which seems very small (*Guicciardiani*).

"That the conduct of Ruth was in accordance with the law under which she lived cannot be doubted. See Deut. xxv. 5—10, where no option seems left to the woman. The demand was a duty which she owed to the memory of her dead husband, whose name she was to continue; to that husband's mother, who was more than a parent to her, and whom she might rescue from indigence and misery; to the nation whose tribes and law of inheritance were thus appointed to be preserved; and to God, whose mandates were thus obeyed, and who held out to her the propect that Messiah possibly might, as we find, he actually did, spring from this union."—*Macartney*.

"Abraham equivocated; David doubly sinned; Peter denied his Lord; Paul was not faultless; Aaron enticed to idolatry; Moses spoke unadvisedly with his lips; in fact every vessel in the sanctuary has been flawed; only one has been pure, perfect, spotless, unimpeachable; that we may all feel how true is that word, 'If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves,' and by the contrast how magnificent is that character which was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners. Suppose, then, Naomi's advice does not commend itself to you as proper even in these circumstances; let it be regarded as wrong; yet the record of what an individual does in the inspired page, is not, therefore, the justification of his conduct."—*Cumming*.

"Tempting God ordinarily is either by acting presumptuously in carnal confidence, or in unbelief through diffidence. . . . Not the encountering difficulties therefore makes us to tempt God; but the acting before and without faith. If the Lord has in any measure persuaded His people, as generally He hath, of the lawfulness, nay, of the *duty*, this persuasion prevailing upon the heart is faith; and acting thereupon is acting in faith, and the more the difficulties are, the more the faith."—*Cromwell*.

VERSES 7—13.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 7. **And when Boaz.** Illustrates the simplicity of ancient patriarchal times and manners (*Lange*). The owners of the crops came every night and slept upon their threshing floors, and this we found to be universal in all the regions of Gaza (*Dr. Robinson*). **Had eaten and drunk.** An Eastern idea that great men were more kindly disposed after eating (cf. Esth. vii. 3). **And his heart was merry** [cheerful]. Not necessarily implying any excess (*Sp. Com.*); cheerful and happy over a bountiful harvest (*Steele and Terry*). [Cf. Judg. xix. 6—9; 1 Kings xxi. 7; 2 Sam. xiii. 8.] In Judges xviii. 20; Prov. xv. 15 it denotes gladness without any reference to eating and drinking. Designed to point out the danger encountered by Ruth, and the virtue of Boaz (*Lange*). **He went to lie down.** Betakes himself to rest in the solitude of the open field (*Lange*). In the open air wrapped up, as it seems, in his cloak (*Wright*). **And she came softly.** See Judges iv. 21. Secretly (*Keil*). Not so, but quietly, softly—in a muffled manner (*Cassel*). **And uncovered his feet.** Servants in the East often sleep in this position. If the weather is cold usage allows this using the covering of the master's bed (*Kitto*). **And laid her down.** And uncovered the skirt of his cloak, and fell (*in sleep*) at his feet (*Syr. Arab*). Natives of the East care little for sleeping accommodation, but rest where weariness overcomes them, lying on the ground (*Postans*).

Ver. 8. **The man was afraid** [startled, *Lange*]. The Targum renders it, "and trembled"—the translator explaining his sense of the word by the silly gloss, and his flesh was made soft like a turnip (*Wright*). **And turned himself.** Rather "bent forward," so as to feel what was at his feet (*Speaker's Com.*). Same word as Judges xvi. 29—"took hold of." "Bent over" (*Cappellus, Rosen. Gesen. Bertheau Wright*).

Ver. 9. **Who art thou?** What is your news? (*Syr.*). **What is your state?**—*i.e.*, What is the matter with you? (*Arab*). **Spread therefore.** Lit. And thou hast spread (*Morison*). A request as in *A V* (*Lange, Wordsworth, Wright, &c*). **Thy skirt.** Thy wings (*Tremel, Junius, Geddes, Bertheau, Keil, Wright, &c.*). Same word as in ii. 12—"Under whose wings thou art come, &c In Hebrew marriages the bridegroom places his *tallith* on the head of his bride. The phrase indicates receiving the woman in *societatem tori* acknowledging her as a wife (*Speaker's Com.*). Equivalent to "I have made thee my wife," in Ezek. xvi 8 (*Wright*). We are inclined, however, to adopt the opinion of those who consider the word to be employed metaphorically of protection, as in ii. 12, a much more delicate way for Ruth to intimate her wish (*ibid*). Let thy name be called upon thine handmaid (cp. Is. iv. 1) by taking her as a wife (*Targum*). But cover thy handmaid with a corner of thy cloak (*Syr.*). **A near kinsman** [a redeemer] **a goel, one that hath a right to redeem.**

Ver. 10. **Blessed be thou.** The same phrase as in ii. 20. Thou hast showed more kindness. Lit. Thou hast made thy last kindness better than the first. The first was faithfulness to her husband and her mother-in-law, the last was her willingness to accept Boaz, aged as he was. This latter feeling, according to Rosenmüller and Bertheau, allied to her attachment to her

former husband, for whom she wished to raise seed (*Wright*). The kindness which thou art showing to thy husband now that he is gone is still greater than that thou didst show to him while he lived (*Michaelis*). Inasmuch as thou followedst. Lit. In not going after the young men, whether [after] a poor one or a rich one.

Ver. 11. My daughter. Continues to speak as one older than herself. Fear not. A common thing to fear where there is intense desire. All that thou required [sayest]. All the city [Lit. gate] cf. Gen. xxxiv. 24; Deut. xvii. 2 [see on iv. 1]. This not to be understood with the Targumist to signify only the council of the elders, but rather to mean all the people who were wont to assemble at the gate (*Wright*). A virtuous woman γυνὴ δυναμεως (*LXX*). Lit. A woman of strength. A good woman (*Lange*). Strong in a moral sense. Corresponds with the common expression, man of valour (*Steele and Terry*). Means that Ruth was strong in all that constitutes female excellence and worth; possessed force of character, &c. The same Hebrew word as in Prov. xxxi. 10: "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." Boaz fully justified in ascribing to this very act an honourable principle.

Ver. 12. And now it is true. Truly indeed only a goel am I (*Bertheau*). כִּי in order to strengthen the assurance (*Lange*). Howbeit there is a kinsman [redeemer] nearer than I. But there is also a goel nearer of kin than I (*Speaker's Com.*). From this it appears that Naomi had laboured under some mistake. Probably she was ignorant of the existence of this nearer kinsman (*Steele and Terry*). Or there may have been on her part a knowledge of his inability or unwillingness to act the part of a redeemer (iv. 6). Cox, however, thinks she had a further purpose. Of the women Naomi has the first claim [upon her kinsman]. How is she to show that she waives it in favour of Ruth? Of the men the unnamed kinsman has the first right to redeem. How is Naomi to indicate that she would prefer Boaz? She achieves both points at a stroke by sending Ruth to Boaz [See *Cox*, p. 115—6].

Ver. 13. Tarry this night. Dangerous to return to the city in the darkness, but not in the indistinct twilight (ver. 14). He cannot send her away, nor is he afraid to let her remain (*Lange*). If he will perform the part of a kinsman. Lit. If he will redeem thee (*Lange*). Translate redeem and redeemer throughout the verse.

VERSES 7—14.

Theme.—A Delicate Mission Defended.

"Fie on possession
But if a man be virtuous withal.—*Chaucer.*

And when Boaz had eaten, etc.

We need not dwell on this part of the narrative except to defend it from unfair surmises, and possibly from what men have added to the simplicity of the story. The Scriptures in this very much like human life—we find in them what we take to them. There are who see evil suggestiveness everywhere. The eye, no longer single, the whole world is full of evil. Nothing in these incidents, however, but what is perfectly in accordance with the customs of the East, the habits of the age, or with modesty itself. Note. (*a*) *Men should be judged by the standard of their own times*—especially in matters of custom. While virtue and vice are the same always, manners and customs are continually varying. Note. (*b*) *An Eastern custom not necessarily a bad one because we do not approve of it* (*Cumming*).

Look, 1. At what is certainly known in connection with the incidents before us. (1) That Boaz and Ruth must have come into daily contact during the harvest season. Hence mutual esteem and regard may be expected to have sprung up (ver. 10) possibly admiration and affection. (2) That there were reasons for reticence on the part of Boaz (*a*) his age (*b*) the fact that there was a nearer kinsman. (3) That the widow had a right to claim marriage from the nearest of kin. [For the Levirate marriage, see extract from Lange, and Crit. and Exeg. Notes on ver. 1, 2 &c.]. If any one might criticise, and complain of the project it is Boaz, yet he does nothing but commend, (ver. 11) a plain proof that neither Naomi or Ruth had overstepped what was customary or lawful under the circumstances. No apology was made by Ruth, no surprise expressed by Boaz (*Statham*).

Look again **II. At** what fairly may be said in defence of the **act.** (1) *It was in general accordance with the usages of the time and place.* The interview in the open air [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes]. The claim made by an act expressive of taking the place of a servant, and of claiming protection (Spread thy skirt, &c.); a more delicate way after all than if done by Ruth in the harvest field before the servants and reapers engaged there. Note. *The transaction concerned only those engaged in it,*—was a matter of the most private and delicate nature. If followed by a refusal on the part of Boaz it was best for both parties, the thing should be kept as a secret. As the issue proved it showed the confidence of both women in the integrity of Boaz. *True love is always bold* and may venture where false would fail. Only in the event of Boaz proving untrue could the end be disastrous, and we may rest assured that Naomi had settled this point to her own satisfaction. She knew her man and acted accordingly. His diffidence must be removed, his recollection of duty stimulated in this abrupt and dramatic way. He must be put upon his honour (*Statham*).

(2) *It was done with a definite end and purpose*, and that in no way connected with intrigue (a) to do honour and raise posterity to the dead Mahlon. To the pure all things are pure. Ruth simple concerning evil. Had there been the slightest immodesty in the place it would have tended to have defeated its own purpose and alienated Boaz. (b) There was the hope that Boaz would redeem the land (*Braden*).

(3) *It was done by the advice of an elderly and pious woman.* Not an English or European mother, indeed bound by the sensitive conventionalities of a highly-civilised and fastidious society, but an Eastern mother, &c. (*Braden*). Note. *Children do not generally sin in collusion with their elders and parents.*

(4) *This advice doubtless had respect to the upright character and known piety of Boaz.* Ruth sent not to a young man but to one advanced in years, one who had previously commended her purity and worth.

IMPROVEMENT. (1) All agree that this is not to be drawn into a precedent (*M. Henry*); laws, customs, etc. differ now. (2) True also that others may do what it is not wise for us to do, go where it would be dangerous for us to go, (*a*) because ther motives are higher and purer than ours, (*b*) because their spirit is less liable to be influenced by evil. One man is no law to another as to what would be temptation. Every man must judge for himself as in the sight of God [cf. on i. 15, p. 65].

Ver 7. *And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, etc. No asceticism here.* Becomes the rich and great to be generous (*M. Henry*). There is a time to be merry. The phrase here involves *no excess* (see Crit. and Exeg. Notes). Means that he was physically comfortable (*Pulpit Com.*) Note. *Christ's glory to declare the sacredness of all natural enjoyments* (*Robertson*). His first miracle wrought at a marriage feast, at which the language of the master (John ii. 10) tells us there had been, not excess of course, but happiness and merry-making. He himself called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber.

"There is but one indivisible point from which we should look at a picture; all others are too near or too distant, too high or too low. Perspective fixes this point precisely in the art of painting; but who shall fix it in regard to truth and morals? (*Pascal*). Now, there are a right and a wrong point from which we may judge of the scene described in these verses. Judge of it according to the maxims and the manners of our own age and country, and we shall inevitably fall into a most mistaken estimate of the characters and events that pass before us. We must be fully aware of the peculiarities in ancient manners and laws; we must stand in thought amid the simplicities and catch the colouring of Oriental pastoral life; for this is the "point neither too near nor too distant, neither too high nor too low" —the true perspective position from which to look, and to form a correct moral judgment of the whole transaction.—*Thomson.*

To understand the incidents of this chapter we must have before us the ancient custom and laws of levirate marriage, so called from the Latin word *levir*, a brother-in-law. We meet the first instance of it in Gen. xxxviii. 8, where Judah calls upon his younger son Onan to marry Er's widow, and thus preserve his

brother's name. The custom, however, was not peculiar to the Hebrews solely, but has been found to exist in several eastern countries. The Mosaic law on the subject is given in Deut. xxv. 5—10, and is in substance as follows: If a man die and leave no children, his brother is under obligation to marry the widow, and she has a right to demand it of him. This obligation, however, is not absolutely binding. . . . . From this book of Ruth we see that the levirate law was so contrived that in case the deceased husband had no surviving brother the obligation to marry the widow devolved upon his next nearest kinsman.—*Lange.*

The Hebrew word for this kinsman is גֹּאֵל *goel* which means a *redeemer*. Its root is the exact equivalent of the Greek λυο *to loose*, from which comes the New Testament λυτρον *a ransom*. The meaning of the word is profoundly set forth in the various grand historical unfoldings of its ideas. According to the social philosophy of the Mosaic law no member of the national organisation was to perish, no branch of the tree was to wither; whatever had been dislocated by natural events was to be reset; whatever had been alienated was to be redeemed. This applied to lands as well as to persons; and the duty of redemption rested, as within the nation, so within the families into which the nation branched out. No one could redeem anything for a family who did not belong to it by blood relationship. The Great Liberator of Israel is God. He frees from servitude. For that reason the Messiah who delivers Israel is called Goël-Redeemer. When He appears he will come as Israel's blood relation and brother, as Christ truly was.—*Cassel* (condensed).

We must remember that delicacy as distinguished from morality consists not in any particular action, but in the conformity of that action with the habits of the society in which we live; while morality often requires a sturdy opposition to those very habits. To judge of the morality of an action we must therefore inquire concerning its conformity to the law of God; to judge of its delicacy, its conformity to the law of contemporary opinion. . . . . Nothing can be more unrighteous than the measure which ungodly persons apply to the characters of the Old Testament saints; the nations called Christian and Protestant, receive from the Gospel notions of purity and real delicacy, of which man, without that revelation, has no conceptions. They receive them, but deny or forget the source from whence they came; and, regarding these Gospel sentiments as natural laws, represent these holy men of God as violating the first principles of the natural law of conscience, when, in fact, they were walking fully in accordance with the light they possessed, and earnestly desiring to see the rising of a brighter day.—*Macartney.*

What took you there? What right had you to be there? Those are the critical questions on which everything depends. If you are passing through temptation with your eye fixed on a pure, true life beyond it, temptation being only a necessary stage upon your way, so long as you keep that purpose, that resolution, that ideal, you shall be safe. If you are in temptation with no purpose beyond it, you are lost.—*P. Brooks.*

VERSE 9.

Theme.—A Cry for Shelter and a Claim for Help.

"Therefore I come, thy gentle call obeying,
And lay my sins and sorrows at thy feet,
On everlasting strength my weakness staying,
Clothed in Thy robe of righteousness complete."

Who art thou? I am Ruth, thine handmaid. Spread, therefore, thy skirt [wings] *over thine handmaid.*

This conversation, a strangely interesting and suggestive one. Fear may possess wise and godly men (ver. 8), yet they moderate it and are not overmastered by it. Boaz evidently has both his terror and his passions completely within control.

Evident, too, that both actors in the scene fully understand the meaning and the teaching of the Hebrew law as to the relationship between them. By a very delicate and thoroughly national figure of speech, the same Boaz has himself referred to and used, (ii. 12) Ruth claims the acknowledgment of this relationship. She asks to do with respect to Boaz what he has already seen her do with regard to Jehovah, *i.e.*, take shelter under his protecting wings. And she uses the strongest argument possible in order to prevail, taken alike from the law and

from the word of God, *Thou art a near kinsman.* The fact that she is of Moab can no longer stand in the way. Has he not himself received and treated her as an Israelitish maiden? (*Lange*).

In this act, I. She claims an honourable acknowledgment of the relationship existing between them. He owed it as a duty, she asks it as a right. Mark, too, the petition can no longer be denied without disgrace to one or the other. She comes with boldness, and risks her fair name upon the result. So with Esther going in to Ahasuerus (Est. iv. 15). So with the woman (Luke viii. 43) approaching Christ, upheld by a similar ground of hope, and a like conviction that help lay in Him. Note. *How brave and trusting is such an approach* (*Wordsworth*). This confidence itself is the earnest of success. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, etc.

So, as between Israel and God, the very same idea is used to convey the idea of covenant relationships recognised as toward His own. "I have spread my skirt over thee," is equivalent to I have made thee my wife (Ezk. xvi. 8).

II. She asks protection and help. Rest under the guardianship of a husband, one of the underlying ideas of the whole book. The covering of the bridegroom's bed called a "wing" among the Hebrews (cf. Deut, xxii. 30). In word and in symbolical action alike Ruth refers to this fact. Note. *Husbands are or should be a protection to their wives.*

These natural relationships have their spiritual analogies. The figurative representation of God in this attitude, as one protecting with outstretched wings, is a common and familiar one in Scripture. [See on "The Sheltering wings," ii. 12, pp. 119, 120.] We have here (1) *a cry* for shelter, (2) *a claim* for assistance. Means take my all under thy care. So sinners come to Christ.

"Rock of ages cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

III. She renounces all else to make this claim (ver. 10). Her near relationship, her encouragement—she takes Boaz for better or worse. And she does all this with abundant and evident humility, self-abasement, and self-renunciation [cf. on ii. 10, page 111.]

IMPROVEMENT. (1) What a lowly attitude. (2) What a significant one. So the Syrophenician woman came to Christ, content to touch the hem of his garment unobserved. So the Gentile Church comes to Christ, humbly, faithfully, and lovingly (*Wordsworth*).

"In the present day, at a Jewish marriage, they always take up the corner of the plaid or cloak of the bridegroom, and spread it over the head of the bride. I saw in the Roman Catholic Church of Notre Dame a marriage, at which they seemed to retain a fragment of the ancient usage; after the parties were married, and the priest was pronouncing the benediction, he spread a robe over the heads of both—a memorial of the ancient Jewish usage, 'Spread thy skirt over me.'"—*Cumming.*

"It is our melancholy and miserable misapprehension, that we fancy there is some reluctance on Christ's part that needs to be overcome, some repulse in His mind that we need to do away with, and that we have to persuade and urge Him to do what we yearn to have done, to forgive us all our sins, and to blot out all our iniquities. This is a great mistake; ten thousand times more willing is Christ to receive you, than ever you were to make application to Him."—*Ibid.*

"'Thou art he that has a right to redeem a family and estate from perishing, and therefore let this ruin be under thy hand; and spread thy skirt over me—be pleased to espouse me and my cause.' Thus must we, by faith, apply ourselves to Jesus Christ as our next kinsman, that is able to redeem us; come under His wings, as we are invited (Matt. xxiii. 37), and beg of Him to spread His skirt over us. Lord Jesus, take me into Thy covenant and under Thy care. I am oppressed, undertake for me."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Marriage is a resting place. The wife finds rest under the protection of her husband, as Israel finds it under the overshadowing wing of Jehovah. Even until the latest times, the figurative representation of God as the living Bridegroom of His people, continues instructively and sublimely, to run through Scripture and tradition. Christ says, (Matt. xxiii. 37), 'How often,' etc. Israel has rest (menuchah) when God spreads out His wings over them. The Psalmist prays to be covered by the shadow of Jehovah's wings. Boaz says to Ruth (Chap. ii. 12), 'May thy reward be complete, since thou hast come to

take refuge under the wings of Jehovah, the God of Israel.' That which Ruth there did with respect to the God of Boaz, she now asks to be permitted to do with respect to Boaz himself. The husband gives rest to the wife by spreading out his wings over her."—*Lange.*

"Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thy arm alone,
And our defence is sure."—*Watts.*

"These times were not delicate. This man, though great in Bethlehem, lays himself down to rest upon a pallet, on the floor of his barn. When he awakes at midnight, no marvel if he were amazed to find himself accompanied. Yet though his heart were cheered with wine, the place solitary, the night silent, the person comely, the invitation plausible, could he not be drawn to a rash act of lust, his appetite could not get the victory of reason, though it had wine and opportunity to help it. Herein Boaz showed himself a great master of his affections that he was able to resist a fit temptation. It is no thanks to many that they are free of some evils. Perhaps they wanted not will, but convenience. But if a man, when he is fitted with all helps to his sin, can repel the pleasure of sin out of conscience, this is true fortitude."—*Bishop Hall.*

VERSES 10, 11.

***Theme.*—VIRTUE RECOGNISED AND BLESSED.**

"A good man's prayers
Will from the deepest dungeon climb to heaven's height,
And bring a blessing down."—*Joanna Baillie.*

Blessed be thou of the Lord, etc. For thou hast shown more kindness, etc. All the city* [gate] *doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

A good man will not lightly condemn the virtuous for some show of evil (*Bernard*). Boaz instead of blaming Ruth blesses her, and praises her virtue, a significant fact to those who question her conduct. Makes no complaint of being disturbed in the night, nor of too great importunateness (*Lange*). On the other hand entertains no thought of abusing her confidence (*Ibid*). Note (*a*) *Actions are often to be estimated from the character of the actor* (*Lawson*). Some unknown cause may explain away everything that otherwise might seem suspicious. (*b*) *Piety prevails even in a situation like this.* She calls herself "his handmaid," he calls her "his daughter," and the actions of both are in keeping with this.

Dwell I. On the benediction. [cf. on II., 4, p. 100; II., 12, p. 116; also on I., 8, 9 p. 38]. May be looked upon either (1) a petition. (2) An expression of good wishes, the opposite of cursing. (3) An affirmation. Note. *The godly although poor may be blessed* (*Bernard*).

Implies (a) *Piety.* Fervent prayer, even when a mere ejaculation or the expression of benevolent desire, *rests upon belief in God* and His willingness to bless. (b) *Deference to the Divine Will.* Bows to that and is in harmony with that. If the words are a mere salutation, they imply sympathy and express friendly and benevolent feelings. How much of the joy and pleasantness of life depends upon a word "fitly spoken!" *These courtesies of life not to be neglected by the true Christian.* Boaz did not forget them even in such a trying situation. They are everywhere sanctioned by Scriptural usage.

II. The Reasons for this expression of goodwill. (1) *Thou hast showed more kindness at the latter end, etc.* The virtuous are better at last than at first (*Bernard*). Thus love grows stronger as difficulties abound; not only begins, but continues its ministry and its mission. So with Ruth. Her affection for the dead Mahlon to be seen in her present act [See on kindness to the dead II., 20]. Note. *Apostates* like Judas, Demas, Alexander (the coppersmith) *were truly good at the first*—grow more evil at the last just because of this (*Bernard*).

(2) *All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.* A great recommendation—her virtue manifest, known, seen, acknowledged. *Graces may*

exist and yet be hidden. Here they shine forth conspicuous, resplendent. A stranger, a Moabitess, yet not only escaping calumny, but winning favour. Such was Ruth. Note. *Virtue makes even the poor to become famous.*

Her virtue manifested in her circumspect conduct towards the aged and the young, rich and poor alike. Manifested everywhere, recognised *of all.* All the city [gates.] Note. *Character tells everywhere* (*Statham*). The price of such above rubies (Prov. xxxi 10-31). Her works to praise her in the gates (31).

IMPROVEMENT.—(a) Virtue (1) recognised (2), received (3), rejoiced over (4), rewarded by the godly. Note. *Virtue a means of preferment, a source of praise,* "Blessed be," &c. (b) See how completely Boaz turns what would have been the hour of temptation to many, into a time when his gifts and graces shine out the more conspicuously. What wise counsel, what just and appropriate speech, what careful thoughtfulness for others, what gentleness, courtesy, and benevolence! Note. *Good men praise virtue where others would practise vice.* Its spell holds them in the extremest moments of temptation.

"She calleth herself his 'handmaid;' he calleth her his 'daughter.' There is nothing lost by humility. The humble shall have 'riches, and honour, and life' (Prov. xxiii. 4)."—*Trapp.*

"How blessed is a man the moment his thought has come into the realisation of this God, who is to-day and to-morrow, night and day, at home and abroad, everywhere, thinking of him and interested in him! Not of a God who is penned up behind marble laws; not a God who is afar off, and who requires that some one shall ascend into the heaven and bring him down; but a God with us; a God in us; a God for us."—*Beecher.*

"Exemplary virtue ought to have its due praise (Phil. iv. 8), and it will recommend both men and women to the esteem of the wisest and best. Ruth was a poor woman and poverty often obscures the lustre of virtue: yet Ruth's virtue, even in a mean condition, were generally taken notice of and could not be hid: nay, her virtues took away the reproach of her poverty. If poor people be but good people they shall have honour from God and man. Ruth had been remarkable for her humility, which paved the way to this honour. The less she proclaimed her own goodness the more did her neighbours take notice of it. In the choice of yolk-fellows, virtue should especially be regarded, known approved virtue. Let religion determine the choice, and it will certainly crown the choice and make it comfortable."—*Matt. Henry.*

"Instead of touching her as a wanton, he blesses her as a father, encourages her as a friend, promiseth her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes and gifts; no less chaste, but more happy than when she came. Oh, admirable temperance, worthy the progenitor of Him in whose lips and heart was no guile!"—*Bishop Hall.*

"A man's nature is best perceived in privateness, for there is no affectation; in passion, for that putteth a man out of his precepts; and in a new case or experiment for there custom leaveth him."—*Bacon.*

"A noble mind!
With this and pleasures under ban,
True faith and holy trust in God,
Thou art the peer of any man."—
Gallagher.

VERSES 12, 13.

Theme.—CARE FOR THE CLAIMS OF OTHERS.

Ah me! How dark the discipline of pain,
Were not the suffering follow by the sense
Of infinite rest and infinite release!
This is our consolation!"—*Longfellow.*

Ver. 12, 13. ***I am thy near kinsman*** [redeemer], ***howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. If he will perform, etc.*** [lit. if he will redeem thee], ***but if not then I will, etc.***

Ruth's recompense and rest begins from this hour. The word of an honorable man is pledged. "*Fear not, I will do to thee etc.,*" and she may repose in confidence upon that. Note. *Where a godly and honest man makes a promise there is little fear of failure.* With such to say is to do.

There is a difficulty, however, in the way of a technical kind indeed, but none the less a difficulty because of that. Evident that Ruth had impressed Boaz favourably, that inclination pointed in the direction outward circumstances and claims were pointing. Note (*a*) *The most subtle and dangerous temptations come in this way.* Come as angels of light, etc. We persuade ourselves we are even serving others and not ourselves. (*b*) *How good men act under such circumstances.* Boaz remembers even in this hour that there is another and a nearer kinsman. Yields the preference to duty, not to inclination.

Suggests **I. Care for the claims of others**—respect for their rights. Note. *Conscientiousness a characteristic of good men always.* Justice to give every one his own, to do to others as we would they should do to us.

(a) *The danger comes from our feelings and desires* in such moments. We naturally seek our own interest, and we are right in doing this, so long as they do not intrude into the sphere sacred to our fellows. Note. *The more ardent the man the more earnest the pursuit*, and therefore the best of men sometimes feel this temptation to step beyond their own sphere the strongest.

(b) *These feelings and desires need to be continually watched.* Very easy to wrong others even in our acts of charity and kindness, much more then in pursuit of our own gratification. Note. (1) *Those nighest to a right are first to be preferred.* (2) *Personal feelings always increase the urgency of the claims of selfishness.* (3) *Grace can conquer even these tendencies in a good man.*

II. Promptness to respond to claims upon ourselves. This request of Ruth's cannot be gainsaid—Boaz does not leave her a moment in doubt. Acknowledges her at once as a kinswoman, and poor as she is, responds to her demand so far as it falls upon him. He himself will prosecute the matter (*Lange*).

(1) *How easy to evade responsibility.* A natural sloth and lethargy of soul towards duty in most men. The priest and the Levite pass by on the other side, leaving the poor wounded and bleeding ones to perish. (Luke x, 31, 32.) (2) *How natural to let it rest upon others,* to lay it upon them, and to criticise them if they fail to respond to it. Note (*a*) *The man who most respects the claims of others is generally the readiest to respond to those upon himself.* Boaz an instance of this: tender, true, conscientious all round. (*b*) *Piety, high principles, true nobility in men run contrary to nature in these things;* make us careful where we are inclined to be careless [in regard to others] and the reverse. (3) *Goodness should show itself in actions,* faith be seen in works, kindliness of heart be manifested in deeds.

Then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee. [Then will I redeem thee] *as the Lord* [Jehovah] *liveth.*

The law made it incumbent on the nearest kinsman to marry the childless widow (Deut. xxv. 5.) so as to redeem the inheritance and prevent the name of the dead husband being forgotten or blotted out. Boaz acknowledges that Ruth's claim cannot be gainsaid. What an encouragement this to the humble seeker! Her rights deferred, not denied.

The Goel or Redeemer here. (1) *Responds to the first application.* No importunity needed. The seeker met half way. The burden and responsibility accepted at once. (2) *Conditionally promises all that is asked.* No right to expect more than a conditional promise. Other rights beyond our own in the universe. (3) *Does so on the existence of God.* "As Jehovah liveth"—a solemn oath, not to be lightly taken, not to be easily put aside. Note. *How strong the hope that is built upon such.* [On the Kinsman Redeemer, see iv. 9-10, p.]

"When Alexander the Great took Tyre he was informed of a young prince who had obtained a high character for virtue, and offered him the crown. The young prince refused it, because he had an elder brother who had a better title than himself to the royal dignity, for they were of the ancient blood of the Tyrian kings. Boaz deserves no less praise than this Tyrian prince. Such a wife as Ruth would have been preferred by Boaz to a royal diadem;

yet he would not take her to himself to wife whilst there lived another man who had a preferable claim to her, if he was willing to make use of his right. We ought to 'look every man not on his own things only but every man also on the things of others.'"—*Lawson.*

"*Howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.* There are different degrees of relation, all of which have their respective duties, and their respective rights belonging to them. We sin either by neglecting any of the duties to these relations, or by arrogating the rights peculiar to nearer relations. Boaz would do everything to serve Ruth that became her nearest relation, but one; and this one thing he declined, because he had no right to do it. He would not intrude into the rights of another man till they were voluntarily surrendered. As every man ought to abide in his own calling, so we all ought to keep our own places in society. Much of the unhappiness, and many of the sins of social life originate in that assuming and meddling disposition, which renders some people a pest to their neighbours and still more to themselves."—*Ibid.*

"What true Christian chivalry born of faith, there was in the heart of this Bethlehem yeoman. He was not only sternly honest, but sensitively honorable, bearing his escutcheon without a sinister brand on it. We trace the same quality in some of the most memorable passages in the early life of his illustrious descendant, the greatest of Israel's kings. David knew from the prophet Samuel that he was divinely selected for the throne of the Hebrew Commonwealth. The life of Saul was more than once in his power, and the unrelenting persecution with which he pursued him and sought to destroy him, would have seemed to a conscience that was less informed and scrupulous, almost to warrant his taking his life, and seizing the sceptre as it fell from his hands. But he will not so much as lift up his finger 'against the Lord's anointed,' or ascend to a throne by steps that are stained with blood. He dare not force Providence, or enjoy a blessing while sitting on the grave of a murdered duty. To wait God's time, is to prove that 'We believe in God,' is not only an article in our creed, but an active principle in our Christian life."—*Thomson.*

"A godly life includes every form of moral virtue—temperance, wisdom, fortitude of every kind, moralities, whether on a low scale of individual interest, on a higher scale of society relations, or in the highest form to which patriotism inspires. All these are included in religion.—*Beecher.*

"He is an Israelite, not only before men, but also before God alone. And it was because he did not forget, what man is naturally so prone to forget, that God sees him, that he is so mindful of his duty. Hypocrites, when alone, are different from what they appear in company. Israelites like Boaz feel and act in the presence of the all-knowing God alone not otherwise than they would if all the stars of heaven and all the creatures of earth could testify against them. Boaz showed an active faith when he gave no place to temptation. Pious and offenceless as he was when Ruth came to claim the right of the poor, he is equally so now when she asks for her right of redemption. Then the question was only about a few ears of grain, now it involves his own person and estate. Then he was kind in the presence of Ruth's humility, now he is humble in the presence of her claim to be righted. Then he forgot herself in the fact that she had ever owned another law than that of Israel. Then his tender delicacy made Ruth assured of her safety in his fields; now that same delicacy understands that since she has come to him the right she claims must be fulfilled. He might have released himself by the letter of the law to which she appeals—there was a nearer relative; but his faith is an active faith. The question was one of right, not of ingenious play with the letter. The claimant must be satisfied. And he does what he promised to do."—*Lange.*

"According to its derivations, *goel* means *one who unlooses,*' unlooses that which has been bound, and restores it to its original position. The *goel* did his duty, for example, if he redeemed a promissory note by paying it and handing it back to the man who had given it; or if he had redeemed a piece of land by paying off the liens upon it and restoring it to its original owner; or if he redeemed a captive by paying his ransom and setting him free. So that the fundamental idea of a *goel* was that of a man who redeemed, or set loose, that which had in any way been bound."—*Cox.*

"It is easy to understand, how, in process of time, this title came to be applied both to Jehovah and to Jesus. Jehovah was the Redeemer of Israel; for, again and again, he interposed to save them from captivity, or to ransom them when they had been carried away captives and to preserve them a name and a place in the earth. Jesus is the Redeemer of the whole world; for when we were captives to divers lusts, and groaning under the oppressions of evil, the Son of Man proved Himself our true kinsman by paying a ransom for us and setting us free from our intolerable bonds."—*Ibid.*

VERSES 14—18.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 14. And she lay at his feet. Lit. The places of his feet. Before one could know another. Lit. Before a man could know his companion. Recognise his friend (*Lange*). The Mishna has decided daybreak to begin when it became possible to distinguish between white and blue; R. Mair when a wolf and a dog—R. Akiba

when an ass and a wild ass—could be distinguished. But others said, when one sees and recognises another person at the distance of four ells (*ibid*). And [*for*] he said, Let it not be known. It might (1) cause scandal, (2) prejudice the other kinsman's choice, (3) render it difficult for him to prosecute his own suit. One suspected of previous intercourse with a foreigner, even though she were a convert, was not allowed to perform the duty of a levirate marriage (*Mishna*). That a woman. That "the" woman. The use of the article [the *i.e.*, this woman] forbids us to suppose that these words were actually addressed to Ruth (*Wright*). Luther and Coverdale explain, "And he said in his heart." They express Boaz's opinion which he had previously intimated to Ruth (*Wright*). The Targumist considers it unlikely from the words that Boaz should have been alone in the threshing floor, and renders it, *Boaz said to his young men.* This idea, if true, should have its due influence in considering the whole chapter.

Ver. 15. Bring. "Allow me." Lit. "Give me." A current phrase of courtesy (*Morison*). The veil. Sheet or apron (*Elliot*), wrapper (*Morison*), mantle (*Lange*). It is merely a square piece of cotton cloth, and I have often seen it used for just such service as that to which Ruth applied hers (*Dr. Thomson; Land and Book*). The mantle worn by the poorer classes is very coarse and strong, and large enough to envelope the whole person. The word used here occurs again only in Is. iii. 22, and is translated "wimple." And he measured six measures of barley. Lit. Six of barley. A considerable load, for he had to put it on her (*Lange*). He measured six sacks (nearly two bushels) of barley, and placed it upon her, and she received strength from the Lord to carry it, and immediately it was said in prophecy that there should come of her the six righteous ones of the world, &c (*Chaldee Paraphrast*). The number six is the symbol of labour and service, which is followed by seven, the time of rest (*Lange, Cox*). She went into the city. The pronoun is masculine. He, Boaz, went (*Lange*). Possibly at once to settle the matter (?). As in *A V. Wright, Vulg. Syr.*

Ver. 16. Who art thou? In what condition? (*i.e.*, in what character?). As the espoused of Boaz, or what? Cp. Judges xviii. 8. (*So Vulg. Bertheau, Michaelis, Maurer, Wordsworth, Steele and Terry, &c.*). Probably still dark when Ruth reached home (*Elliot, Drusius*). Naomi knew her daughter, and addressed her as such (*Bellamy*). How art thou? (*ibid*). Go not empty. Not to return as one unappreciated.

Ver. 18. Sit still. Remain quiet (*Lange*). Stay quietly at home (*Steele and Terry*). How the matter will fall. How it is decreed from heaven (*Targum*). The man will not be in rest. Omit "be in" (*Lange*). His actions and his oath show that he will quickly decide the matter.

VERSE 14.

Theme.—Caring for a Good Name.

"It is a busy talking world
In which licentious breath blows, like the wind,
As freely on the palace as the cottage."—*Rowe.*

She rose up before one could know another [Lit. Before a man could recognise his friend]. *And* [for] *he said, let it not be known, that a* [the] *woman, &c.*

Boaz hopes she may escape unobserved. This necessary, lest the rights of the other kinsman might have seemed to have been infringed upon [see Crit. and Exeg. Notes]. They must act not only with strictest honour and propriety, but with the greatest circumspection and care. Note. *Certain situations and circumstances may render it wise and even necessary to do things otherwise uncalled for and improper.* Times when secrecy is a duty. If we have done anything that may expose ourselves or other to unjust suspicion if it were known, it is not inconsistent with integrity to conceal it, providing it can be done without falsehood or dissimulation (*Lawson*).

A. Thomson on this (condensed):—

Let it not be known, etc. We, may generally, suspect the prudence, if not the virtue, of an act when it needs to be concealed. Boaz possibly felt this.

I. The duty of caring for a good name. A treasure no wise man will trifle with. Boaz knew its value—trembled when he found himself unexpectedly in circumstances capable of an injurious construction—sought to screen Ruth from the withering blight of scandal. True (1) that the judgment of men cannot

affect our relation to God; (2) that the approval of conscience is worth more than the applause of a kingdom. Yet there are two things whereof every man should be specially chary and tender—his conscience and his credit (*St. Augustine*). Moral power a divine trust. An equivocal reputation seriously enfeebles or entirely neutralises our influence, and so injures our power of benefiting men and of glorifying God. "The sons of God are to be without rebuke." A good name rather to be chosen than riches. This one of the seals upon the Pentecostal Christians. Said (Acts ii. 46, 47) of them they were "praising God and *having favour with all the people.*"

II. **The duty of charity in our judgment of others.** Boaz judged of Ruth by himself. In the light of the report of her modest and seemly behaviour, overlooked the boldness of the step because of the virtuous motive that had prompted. The wisest course to form our estimate of a doubtful action by the character of the actor. When we stand in doubt let love turn the scale.

Yet how difficult to teach the grand lesson of charity. Perverse ingenuity puts the worst construction, makes up by surmise what is wanting in evidence, hastens to circulate the slanderous tale, etc. Characteristic, however, of a citizen of Zion that "he taketh not up an evil report against his neighbour."

> "To be noble, we'll be good,
> I live not in myself, but I become
> Portion of that around me."—*Byron.*

Ver. 15. *Bring the veil that thou hast, etc. He measured six measures of barley etc.* A good man will avail himself of the smallest occasion, the slightest chance of doing good, and conferring benefits upon the worthy. *The liberal heart is never weary of well doing.* Boaz shows himself the same bountiful, large-hearted man in the threshing floor as in the harvest field. [On "Liberal Giving," see II. 15, 16, pp. 127-8.] (1) Here was *tangible proof of his regard and thoughtfulness* Every grain a testimony to his esteem and affection for the widow of his kinsman He said, "Go not empty unto thy mother-in-law." Did ever a true man send such "empty" away? (2) *Possibly a gift in part to avert suspicion.* Her appearance laden with grain, would be less likely to attract attention or call for remark as she generally left the fields of Boaz laden in this way. *A harmless subterfuge unless used to conceal actual guilt.* Everything else of this kind must be judged by the motive behind. (3) *Certainly a significant hint to Naomi.* Said plainly that the claim had in part been responded to. *Lange* and *Cox* see a further significance in the number of measures of barley, *six.* In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the seventh the Sabbath of rest follows. [See Crit. and Exeg. Notes.] (?) Naomi would see the grain in bulk, and Ruth's mention of six measures may have been merely accidental. Just possible, however, that Boaz significantly hinted the result in this way, "The day of rest is at hand."

"Here is a very important lesson; we are not only to abstain from what is evil, but from even the appearance of evil. Some people are more zealous in abstaining from the appearance than from the evil; others are more zealous, and truly so, in abstaining from the evil than from the appearance. Our duty is to abstain from both; not only to do no evil, but, as far as in us lies, to give to no man the opportunity of misconstruing the good that we do. We shall not escape misconstruction; it would be wonderful if we did. Misconstructions of piety and Christian character we shall escape: but the misinterpretations of envy, of pride, of jealousy, of ill-nature, which are not yet rooted out of the world, it will be impossible for any man to avoid, do as he please, and therefore the only way is not to notice murmurs that must soon die."—*Cumming.*

"A holy Paul, it has been said, may sometimes be found on board a ship that has Castor and Pollux for its sign. It is recorded of the excellent Bishop Ken, that, when his copy of the Bible was examined after his death, it opened spontaneously at Paul's great chapter of the Corinthians and charity."—*Thomson.*

"There is an over-sensitiveness and over-delicacy which shows not innocence, but an inflammable imagination. The soul spreads its own hue over everything; the shroud or wedding garment of nature is woven in the loom of our own feelings. Persons seem to each man what he is to himself. One who suspects hypocrisy in the world is rarely transparent; the man

constantly on the watch for cheating is generally dishonest; he who suspects impurity is prurient."—*Robertson.*

"If we indulge in a tendency to criticise our neighbour's affairs, we shall soon find ourselves speaking things that, to use Solomon's phrase are 'like the piercings of a sword.' We can easily ruin a noble reputation, just as a mischievous child can pull the most beautiful flower in pieces, but like him, we cannot restore again its symmetry and fragrance. We are more powerful for evil than we think. I am aware that an immense amount of scandal is not malicious in intention, and is uttered unconsciously.

"Evil is wrought from want of thought
As well as want of heart."—*Braden.*

"Christian, behold the kindness and gentleness of Boaz! Will it then be possible that God, when thou art in need, will send thee empty away? Never! His generous hand is never closed. Only open Him thine heart, and divine gifts flow in upon thee without any action on thy part."—*Starke.*

VERSE 18.

Theme.—Rest in Ourselves and Rest in Another.

"Who may not strive, may yet fulfil
The harder task of standing still,
And good but wished with God is done."—*Whittier.*

Sit still [Remain quiet] ***my daughter until thou know, etc. For the man will not rest.***

The Hebrew bride had to remain at home until her affianced husband came to fetch her (*Cox*). Naomi's advice is evidently that Ruth shall take this position. Mark, however! *The command only follows strenuous effort.* She has done all that she could, all that lay on her side. Now she must wait, not be perplexed, not unduly anxious. Rest in herself, in her own mind, is to foreshadow and be the earnest of *rest in the house of a husband* [cf. on I. 9; III. i.].

Dwell, I. On the principle underlying this injunction. A time to speak and a time to be silent; a time to act and a time to "sit still"; a time for enterprise and a time for remaining quiet; a time to work and a time to wait. Note. *Two sides to life, the active and passive*, and both necessary. Night the counterpart and complement of day, rest and sleep of toil and activity. Men must fall in with the claims of the one as of the other; respond to the laws of "rest" as of motion, quietness, as of activity. Note. A lesson for this busy age here.

"The world is too much with us: late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."—*Wordsworth.*

Men are naturally restless in critical moments like this. The mind anxious, perplexed, etc. Yet it may pre-eminently be our duty to sit still then, (*a*) *because it is the Divine will.* God said to Israel at the most critical moment in her history, the sea in front, the mountains on either hand, the enemy behind, "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. xiv. 13). So in another critical moment, "Who is among you . . . that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and *stay* upon His God" (Is. l. 10). Note. *In such moments our strength is to sit still*, even when we are saying with Saul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

(*b*) *Because it is the only wise course.* What can be done by disquieting and anxious thoughts? Ruth, for instance, could not alter the laws of the country.

Note. (1) *There are times when it is a waste of power to make further effort, and a waste of feeling to allow anxiety to distress the heart* (*Radford Thomas*). The Psalmist pictures such a moment (Ps. xxxvii.) when men would naturally be fretful and anxious; and the exhortation to such is, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (v. 7 cf. also 1—3).

Note. (2) *There are times when we are simply helpless, and effort is impossible.*

Sitting still certainly justified then. This the underlying thought in Milton's exquisite "Sonnet on his own Blindness":—

"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?
* * * * *
God doth not need
Either man's works or his own gifts.
* * * * *
They also serve who only stand and wait."

A lesson here for those laid aside by sickness and infirmity. Providence is saying to such, "Sit still." Difficult, but not impossible, to wait while others work. God's message to such, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isaiah xxx. 15).

II. The reasons given here for this injunction. (1) *To give time and past effort a fair chance.* "Until thou know how the matter will fall." Sometimes wise to wait for the sake of observation—where we are, what we have already done. The traveller has to pause to find his bearings, the sculptor to see the effect of the blow he has already given. *Restlessness condemned here*, that restlessness which would be for ever rooting in the earth to see whether the seed is growing. Note. *Faith and patience are essentials in human life.* A lesson to Christian ministers, among others. Preach, labour in season, out of season, etc.; but learn also to wait, to rest in the promises, to leave the results with God. *Overdoing condemned here*, that overdoing which undoes all that already has been done.

(2) *To give time and the efforts of others a fair chance.* "For the man will not rest until he have finished the thing." The past had proved how true and honourable Boaz was—how much to be depended on. Note. (*a*) *We sit still the more readily when we know that others are engaged on our behalf.* Nay, we are such, so weak in ourselves, that *we never find rest at all until we find rest in another.* A deep principle here which lies at the foundation of the marriage relationship (iii. 1). Note. (*b*) *The whole Christian economy and scheme of redemption rests upon this fact, that man needs help from without*—that he cannot save himself, and that he cannot "rest" until he finds it.

LESSONS.—(1) We may "sit still" when duty has been loyally performed. (2) When another who is competent has undertaken for us. Note. (a) *He who rests in Christ rests not without reason;* has found an advocate, brother, friend, kinsman, Saviour, Redeemer; his confidence is not that of the slothful, or the careless. (b) *He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works* (Heb. iv, 10). Mary rather than Martha the type of Christian discipleship (Luke x, 42).

Theme.—PROMPTITUDE IN DUTIES, SECULAR OR SACRED.

"Make haste O man to do
Whatever must be done;
Thou hast no time to lose in sloth,
Thy day will soon be done."—*Bonar.*

Dr. A. Thomson (condensed) on *The man will not* [be in (omit)] *rest until he have finished the thing this day.*

This favourable estimate Naomi had formed of the character of Boaz. A man who meant what he said and did it—not only held a promise sacred, but went about its fulfilment with a will. Did the right thing at the right time—a person of probity and promptitude.

Another passage of Scripture kindred to this (Ezra iii. 4). The Israelites, on their return from Babylon, again offered the daily sacrifice "*according to the custom as the duty of the day required.*" A rich ethical meaning in this word "duty"—

something due by us to God. When it is said we "ought" to do a thing, it means we owe it to God to do it. Not only with the Israelites no omission, but no delay until the morrow. Not "like silver bells out of tune," their clock always seemed to strike at the right moment. Note. *One of our Saxon Kings called Ethelred the Unready.* The subject then, punctuality and promptitude in duties, whether secular or sacred.

I. Certain rules which are indispensable if this is to be our characteristic and habit. (*a*) *Not to undertake too much work*, grasp at more engagements than there is a reasonable likelihood of being able to accomplish. (*b*) *Endeavour by forethough to make the most of every hour.* Wise arrangement makes work easier and the day longer, just as careful packing makes a box contain twice as much, etc. (*c*) *Must be no indolent procrastination* or giving away before little difficulties. Keep ourselves masters of circumstances. Examples. (1) Eliezer of Damascus sent to seek a wife for Isaac. What deliberation! What concentration of aim! What promptitude! (2) Nehemiah building the ruined wall of Jerusalem. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with *all thy might!*

The benefits of this ordering of time various and great. Makes what we do likely to be well done, saves time, conscience, temper, etc.

II. Apply the principle to some things in detail, *e.g.* the matter of personal salvation. Every other interest should be made to stand aside as a "grand impertinence" until the man "has given heed to the things of his peace."

Assuming the supreme interest has been cared for. (1) *There are certain duties which regularly fall to be performed by us, and which may be described as the work of every day*, recur almost as regularly as the rising and setting of the sun, or the ebbing and flowing of the ocean tides. (*a*) The duties of our stated secular vocation. Daily summoned anew in these to serve God. Whatever ye do, in word or deed, etc. (Col. iii. 17). Paul exemplified his own rule, preaching Christ, and making tents at Corinth. The Christian disciple may find in every hour of his daily toil—

> "Room to deny himself, a road
> To bring him daily nearer God."

(*b*) The more direct exercises of religion, especially secret devotion, prayer, reading of God's Word, etc.

(2) *There is another class of special duties appropriate to particular times and circumstances*, which may be said to grow out of them. (*a*) "The weekly rest of the Lord's day," (*b*) "Last will and testament." Saves family discord. Do it at once. The work of the day should be done in the day. (*c*) Reconciliation with friend or brother. Be magnanimous, "not in rest," until you have finished the thing this day." (*d*) Warning friend gradually coming under evil habits. (*e*) Succouring the widow, speaking a seasonable word for those who are struggling. Make haste! To-morrow may be too late. Finish the thing this day.

There are opportunities for doing good, which, if allowed to pass unimproved, can never return. It is often now or never. Other chances or ways may be presented, but this particular service never again. The disciples in Gethsemane lost a golden opportunity. Hence Christ's words of disappointment, "Sleep on now," etc. So with our words of warning and acts of goodness. If omitted, the opportunity will never return. Oh, sad neglect! cruel procrastination!—

> "Make haste O man to live,
> Thy time is almost o'er;
> O sleep not, dream not, but arise—
> The Judge is at the door."

"What could she now do better than to sit still, resigning herself to the providence of God. Things that will happen cannot be prevented by our utmost solicitude. Things not appointed will never take place if all the care, and all the toil of men and angels were jointly employed to bring them about."—*Lawson.*

"We live one day at a time. God has but laid upon us the burden of one day. If we will attend to daily duty and daily devotion,

if we will do the thing He commands, though not knowing whither they may tend, or how they will bring about good, He will see to the issue."—*Lynch.*

"Defer nothing till to-morrow that may as well be done to-day, either for yourselves or for your friends. 'Who knows what a day will bring forth?' It is said of Richard II. that he lost his crown and life by being a day too late in coming to join his army in Wales." —*Lawson.*

"It would be well if this testimony could always be borne to us, that we would not be in rest till we had fulfilled the duty that was once fairly laid before us."—*Macartney.*

"It is a comfort to have dealings with such men [as Boaz]. They do not promise and forget to perform, but are men of honour, straightforward, energetic, doing well, while other dilatory people would be dreaming about it."—*Braden.*

"There are some men who are never in good time for anything. They appear to have put the clock of their time ten minutes too late for life."—*Hamilton.*

"The road of by-and-by leads to the town of never. That which the fool does in the end the wise man does in the beginning." —*Spanish Proverbs.*

"Have you ever seen those marble statues in some public square or garden, which art has so fashioned into a perennial fountain, that through the lips or through the hands the clear water flows in a perpetual stream, on and on for ever; and the marble stands there —passive, cold—making no effort to arrest the gliding water. It is so that Time flows through the hands of men . . . . so that the destiny of nine men out of ten accomplishes itself slipping away from them, aimless, useless, till it is too late."—*Robertson.*

"No rest until work be done, until duty be fulfilled! Then rest can never be ours here, but yonder, for here work is never done."—*B.*

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOEL AT THE GATE.

CONTENTS.—*Boaz in the presence of the elders of Bethlehem obtains the right of redeeming the inheritance of the dead Elimelech. Amid the acclamations and congratulations of the people at the gate, he publicly takes Ruth to be his wife. Obed is born, and the generations of Phares are traced as far downward as David.*

VERSES 1-10.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. **Then went Boaz up.** Bethlehem situated on a hill, while the cornfields and threshing floor would be in the valley below [cf. on ii. 4, p. 101, also p. 6.] **The gate.** The place of resort where business was transacted. I have seen in certain places, Joppa for example, the Kady and his Court sitting at the entrance of the gate hearing and adjudicating all sorts of causes in the audience of all that went in and out thereat (*Thomson*). **And sat.** Stone seats would be there. The attitude expressive of deliberation. Eastern people are never in a hurry at such times. The judges sat in the gates that the country people might not be compelled to enter the cities and so suffer detriment (*Lange*). **And behold.** Set forth as with a starry note (*Trapp*). Possibly calls attention to the fortunate coincidence or Providence of the thing. Lange thinks Boaz came early not to miss his man. **Ho such a one.** κρύψι hidden one (LXX). Conveys the idea of his being kept anonymous purposely. The Hebrew words *peloni almoni* are derived from *palah* to distinguish, to point out, and *alam* to conceal (*Gesen* 53, 677), and signify a person who is pointed out, but whose name is concealed (*Wordsworth*). At present any anonymous donor to the synagogue funds is habitually styled "*Almoni Peloni*" (*Picciotto*). The name of the kinsman was Tob (*Midrash*). Impossible (*Lange*).

Ver. 2. **And he took ten men.** So Abraham bargained for a place of sepulchre in the field of Machpelah, in the presence of those who stood at the gate of Hebron (Gen. xxiii. 17, 18). Possibly ten were chosen because it was a perfect number. The requisite number for a local court of magistracy (*Groser*). In later days ten men were needed to form a worshipping assembly in the synagogue (*Ibid*). **Of the elders of the city.** Elderly persons of the city (*Morison*).

Ver. 3. **And he said unto the kinsman** [redeemer.] The narrator again avoids using the name, though there is little doubt it must have been known.

Naomi that is come again. The Athenians had a law, that no woman should be permitted to plead her own cause. The custom of all Eastern nations lay in the same direction. **Selleth** [sold] **a parcel of land.** Rather, hath sold (*Wordsworth, Lange, Wright*). Naomi had already sold her interest in the land during the terms of years that intervened between the date of sale and the year of jubilee, when the land would revert to the representatives of **Elimelech; and the nearest of kin could** [only] **gain immediate possession by redeeming it,**

that is, by paying the worth of the land during the term of years which still remained to the jubilee (*Wordsworth*). She had mortgaged her own and Ruth's life interest in the land (*Braden*). That, contrary to the opinion of the earlier commentators, a widow could do this —see *Lange in loco*. Probable that Elimelech had sold his interest before he went into the land of Moab (*Elliot*). In this case, the reversionary interest of Ruth, as the widow of Mahlon, would have to be purchased by the next of kin, as well as the life interest of Naomi (*Ibid*). Others think that the destitution of the widows arose, not from having lost their property, but from their inability to turn it to a profitable account. Morison views the use of the perfect here as expressing such an unalterable determination to sell the land, that it may be looked upon as already accomplished, and translates "Has resolved to sell," So *Drusius, Vatable, etc.* "Offers for sale" (*Luther, Coverdale*). She may have put up the land for sale, for the express purpose of putting the law in motion, and compelling her kinsman to redeem it (*Cox*). Our brother Elimelech's. Or kinsman Elimelech's. The word not to be interpreted in a strict sense [cf. on II. 1 Crit. and Exeg. Notes, p. 89.]

Ver. 4. And I thought to advertise the—Determined to inform thee (*Lange*). Lit., I said I will uncover thine ear; ἀποκαλνψω τὸ οὖς σου (LXX.), by lifting up the hair which covers it [cp. 1 Sam. ix. 15; 2 Sam. vii. 27] (*Wordsworth*). Buy it before the inhabitants. In the presence of those sitting here (LXX. Vulg. Syr. Arab). So also Lange, Wordsworth, etc. If thou wilt not redeem it. The Text. Recept. reads, "If *he* will not. The common reading is supported by Schmidt, Lange, Carpzov, Keil, etc., and is more natural. So fifty MSS. in Kennicott (*Wordsworth*). And he said, I will redeem. Shows he had the ability. Would add to his own estate to procure the property of the dead Elimelech. Supposed he would only have to pay Naomi a certain annual allowance till her death, and the inheritance would pass to him as the lawful heir (*Steele and Terry.*)

Ver. 5. Thou must buy [thou buyest] it also of Ruth. Must take the widow of Mahlon who had a claim upon the land. The children born of such a marriage would inherit the state, to the exclusion of children by an earlier wife. Would stand as the direct descendants of Mahlon, and be called by his name. The Moabitess. Here was the difficulty, and Boaz presents it thus fairly and delicately. The goel does not lay hold of the fact that the law against marriage with a Moabitess, if such existed [cf. on I 4] may have been suspended because Ruth had cast in her lot with Israel.

Ver. 6. I cannot. Means I will not for certain reasons [ver. 4]. The Targum says he had a wife and children. Lest I mar [injure] mine own inheritance. By spending time and attention besides money upon that which would revert to the name and estate of another. This possibly only an excuse. The true reason found in his superstitious fears. Thinks he ought not to take into his house a woman marriage with whom has already been visited with the extinguishment [according to popular ideas] of a family in Israel (*Lange*).

Ver. 7. Now this was the manner in former times concerning &c. Formerly in cases of redemption and exchange (*Lange*). That is in every bargain this was done. Shews that considerable time must have elapsed between the events recorded and the writing of the story. An old custom has fallen into partial disuse in the meantime [cf. Intro. p. 4]. A man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbour. A man pulled off his shoe and gave it to the other (*Lange*). In acknowledgement that he to whom the shoe was given might tread and own where he the seller had previously stood as owner. The shoe is the symbol (1) of motion and wandering, (2) of rest and possession (*Lange*). When the prodigal is reinstated, he has shoes put on his feet (Luke xv. 22) (cf. also Ex. iii. 5; Eph. vi. 15).

Ver. 8. So he drew off his shoe, i.e., the kinsman drew it off, and so surrenders all claims. The woman had the right in ordinary cases to pluck the shoe off herself and spit in the face of the kinsman—a great dishonour [cf. Deut. xxv. 7]. This shews that the present case was looked upon as exceptional. When an Arab divorces his wife, he says of her, "She was my slipper and I cast her off," (*Thomson*).

Ver. 9. And Boaz said. He addresses the elders in their representative character. Under the theocracy the principle of representation was early carried out (*E. Price*). Possibly a pause follows v. 8, during which Naomi and Ruth may have been brought upon the scene. Ye are witnesses. Settled deeds of compact in our modern sense not used or needed. Enough, in a simple primitive age, that a solemn transaction should be committed to the memory of the people (*E. Price*). I have bought [acquired] all that was, etc. The three dead relatives are mentioned with legal precision and particularity, although no mention is anywhere made of Orpah's claim, which, in contradistinction to Ruth's, is looked upon as forfeited or lapsed, if it ever existed. Of the hand of Naomi. Evidently looked upon as heir to the property now her sons are dead. To use a modern legal phrase, she was considered as a trustee until the birth of a male child (*E. Price*).

Ver. 10. Ruth the Moabitess. Deut. xxiii. 3. refers to males, not to women (*Keil, E. Price*), as with Canaanitish women [Deut. vii. 3]. Have I purchased. Acquired (*Lange*). Means to obtain, to acquire, which may be done in a variety of ways. The use of the word "purchased" unfortunate (*Ibid*). To raise up the name, etc. A Hebraism signifying the continuance of the relation he had sustained in the genealogy of his tribe (*E. Price*). From v. 21 it would seem as though popular opinion were too strongly in favour of Boaz to allow the usual law to come in to operation. The gate of his place. The Chaldee reads, "the sanhedrim of his place," introducing a later idea (*E. Price*).

VERSE 1—5.

Theme.—FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

"And next the valley is the hill aloft,
And next the darke night is the glad morrow,
And also joy is next the fine of sorrow."—*Chaucer.*

Then went Boaz up to the gate.

The interesting and fascinating story draws near to its proper conclusion. Ruth's virtue has been seen "in all the gate"; now her reward and recompense are to be as plainly apparent there. Another,—a *goel*, a redeemer has undertaken to perform the duties which fall upon him. Note. (1) *Here is an image of the final perseverance of the saints.* Continuing first, then crowned afterwards, steadfast under discipline and temptation, then to be owned of Christ, and manifested to all as His own in the day of His glory (Rev. iii. 5, etc.). (2) *Here is a picture and illustration of virtue triumphant* true to all ages. After humiliation, exaltation, after the bitter, sweet, after mourning, joy. So with Joseph in Egypt, Moses, David, etc.

It is not Ruth, however, so much who claims attention for the present, as her goel intent on her behalf. We have seen Boaz "diligent in business (ii. 4, iii. 2), fervent in spirit" (ii. 4, 12), courteous (ii. 4), quick to perceive goodness in others (ii. 11, iii. 10, 11), ready to encourage and commend it (ii. 12, iii. 10), generous and hospitable (ii. 8, 9, 14-16, iii. 15), wise and circumspect, and having his own spirit under complete control, in what otherwise might have been the hour of temptation (iii. 10-14), acting always as in the presence of God. And here we are to see him as possessing other qualities, which go to make up the hero, and the true man, one commanding respect not less by his moral earnestness and diligence than by his wealth and social rank. We follow him to the gate and see him among his peers, evidently received as few men in Bethlehem would be.

I. This is how business should be attended to.

(1) *Speedily.* The man is in earnest, "will not rest until he has finished the thing." Gets up early to catch his man [see Crit. and Exeg. III. 15, p. 160].

(2) *Expeditiously.* Will finish it before the day is over [see on III. 18, p. 164]. All that has ever been said in praise of the diligent may be said of Boaz here.

(3) *Righteously.* In the spirit of candour and fair dealing. Hence he seeks the advice of friends; "the Council at the gate." Conceals nothing, overstates nothing, speaks apparently without bias. In few and fit words he propounds the cause and brings it to an issue (*Trapp*). Note. (*a*) *That a true and right result may be obtained in this simple honourable way.* Crooked courses are not always the best courses. (*b*) *An example of the right use of arbitration* which might often be followed with advantage. The justice may be administered in a rough and ready way to our Western ideas, but it is justice none the less that is sought and obtained. And the decision arrived at will be solemnly ratified as in the sight of God.

Note.—(*a*) *That which is done with the heart is done with cheerfulness and readiness.* Love lends wings to the feet, and strength to the hands, and persuasive eloquence to the tongue. So with Boaz in the chapter before us. Duty and affection alike urge him. (*b*) *When God appoints, he prospers and gives wisdom in the direction of the affair.* How much there is to be admired in the way Boaz proceeds to settle this delicate affair once and for all. And as if the Divine favour is to rest upon him at once, the man he seeks and upon whom everything depends comes by as soon as the business is fairly set afloat [On Seeming Chances, Real Providences, see II. 3, p. 95-6].

(4) *An honourable man's dealings while perfectly frank and open are not to be deficient in wise circumspection.* Boaz having to do with a wily worldling deals warily with him (*Trapp*). Tells him first of the land, and then of the wife that must go along with it (*Ibid*). The man of God is to be wise as well as harmless in his dealings with men.

II. This is how difficult affairs should be settled, delicate claims adjusted, fair rights allowed and satisfied.

(1) *Openly and publicly.* That is unless scrupulous justice can be administered privately in a better way. The rights between man and man must not be left to chance or fraud. Note. (*a*) *Greed and rapacity flourish best in secret.* Naturally seek to hide their deeds. Honest men can bear and covet the light. (*b*) *The fountains of justice are best kept pure by being constantly open to public inspection.*

(2) *By the advice of wise men.* We have here an old world picture of a city council. (*a*) Abundance of witnesses to attest the proceedings, (*b*) of counsellors to give advice, (*c*) of judges to determine difficulties. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses" every word would "be established;" while "in the multitude of counsellors" there would be "safety." Notice again they were the choice men of the city—aged, experienced—elderly men upon whom devolved the conducting of affairs in Bethlehem. Note. *Age and experience give weight to advice and decisions.*

(3) *Calmly and deliberately.* They sat down. Undue haste to be deprecated in conducting important affairs like these.

(4) *With care and exactitude.* Business should be done in a business-like manner, not only to make provision against defects in integrity, but also to prevent difficulties arising from failures in memory, &c. Note. *A Scripture precedent here for scrupulous exactness in transactions like these,* transactions involving questions of property. You have the wisdom, dignity and grave deliberation, the solemn careful procedure such a case demanded.

III. This is the way the affairs of the destitute and needy especially should be attended to. All this for two poor widows! *Yes, but this is the public care.* "The poor ye have always with you." It was no personal concern of these elders and yet they gave time and attention to it, and that readily. Note. *Thus early in human history the claims of the weak were recognised and responded to publicly.* Christ answers the question so often asked as to "Who is responsible?" in the parable of the Good Samaritan. So the Apostle, Bear ye one another's burdens, &c.; Look not every man on his own things, &c. (Phil. ii. 4).

E. Price on this: *Theme.*—RESPECT FOR PROPERTY.

The modern war against property can never be justified by the far-seeing Laws of Moses. And, of course, Boaz would hold himself bound to observe them, as here illustrated.

1. He conforms to the letter of the enactment as for as possible.
2. He avows the fact publicly: before the elders and the people.
3. He evokes the confirmatory act of adequate witnesses.
4. He, nevertheless, is careful in stating his claims in order to enforce his full rights.

Observe then, how it was through the sanctified 'property' the hopes of the world were met, in the advent of the Messiah. And (2) how the observance of righteous rules respecting this 'property,' restricts no man's real liberty.

"The gates of ancient cities played many parts: they were guard-houses; they were markets, they were courts of justice; they were places for public deliberation and audience. Necessarily, therefore, they were massively built, with recessed chambers or divans in the sides, and often with chambers also above the arch. Here the inhabitants of the city were wont to assemble, either for the transaction of business or to hear and tell the

news. Here the judges sat and administered justice to all comers. Here even kings came to give audience to other kings, or to their ambassadors. Some faint resemblance to these ancient gates may be found in the structures called 'Bars,' in London and Southampton, though these modern gates are much smaller than their ancient prototypes; and some faint reminiscence of their character as seats of judicial and royal authority in the titles Sublime Porte, or the Ottoman Porte—porte meaning gate—by which the Government of Turkey is still designated."—*Cox.*

"Boaz was worthy of the confidence reposed in him. He at once seeks the nearer kinsman, and brings the matter to a decided issue. How many an hour of bitter anxiety, of suspense—a form of anguish harder to bear than the certainty of disappointment—have the unhappy to undergo, simply because those who have undertaken their cause, gratulating themselves on the benevolence of their intentions seem to think that, if they accomplish the service, the time and manner are of no importance, but that in these they may suit their own convenience. If, like Boaz, we would judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow, let us, like him, 'not be in rest until we have finished the thing.'"—*Macartney.*

"'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!' He knew the preference which both Naomi and Ruth had for himself; he was conscious too that he no longer regarded with indifference this beautiful daughter of Moab, who had 'come to trust beneath Jehovah's wings;' nor was he unwilling to pay even more for the redemption of the inheritance than this nearest kinsman. But he 'would not go beyond or defraud his brother,' or in the least take advantage either of his ignorance or of Ruth's preference. All was open and above-board. His fine sense of honour was not blunted either by covetousness or by inclination, nor would his conscience allow him, even when seeking a good and generous end, to have recourse to sharp practice. Here is that 'clear and round dealing which is the honour of man's nature.'"—*Thomson.*

"Aristides being judge between private persons, one of them declared that his adversary had greatly injured Aristides. 'Relate rather, good friend,' said he interrupting him, 'what wrong he hath done thee, for it is thy cause not mine, that I now sit judge of.' Being desired by Simonides, the poet, who had a cause to try before him, to stretch a point in his favour, he replied: 'As you would not be a good poet if your lines ran contrary to the just measures and rules of your art; so neither should I be a good judge or an honest man if I decided aught in opposition to law and justice."—*Percy Anecdotes.*

"There then is the court of justice. How simple! How primitive! No lawyers and expensive forms; no long rhetorical arguments; but a quiet deliberative meeting, in which the persons concerned 'sit' and talk over the whole affair. Perhaps many a tangled matter would soon come out straight, many a dispute be quickly settled, if at first people would submit it to some such Board of Arbitration."—*Braden.*

VERSE 6.

***Theme.*—A SHORTSIGHTED POLICY AND ITS MERITED OBLIVION.**

"Despite those titles, power and pelf,
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured and unsung."—*Scott.*

I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance.

The kinsman's conduct here stands out as a contrast for all time with that of Boaz. Are we wrong in seeing in him an example of the mean equivocating worldling? When it is a question of the land (ver. 4) he will redeem, but when it is a question of the law which binds him to succour the widow as well as take possession of the land, he hesitates. He stands as a representative of that large class who say "I cannot" to every appeal. Note (*a*) *Something will always come in to hinder from the path of duty if we will allow it.* "A lion in every street." No man ever equivocated, or prevaricated in such a moment but the devil helped him to a sufficient and plausible excuse. (*b*) *We may miss or misuse the one opportunity in life.* This man did so undoubtedly. May be profitable to look,

I. At some of the probable reasons for his action.

(I) *A prejudice, and belief in a common superstition.* Ruth a Moabitess. In Israel marriage with the daughter of an alien race was held to be

"unlucky" even when it was lawful (*Cox*). No doubt, the popular voice affirmed that Mahlon and Chilion were cut off before their time because they married strange women (*Ibid.*) How superstitious fear rides some men against the plainest dictates of reason! It needs a strong mind, a truly noble spirit to shake off the control of popular opinion, to say nothing of popular superstition. No matter that Ruth's virtues are known "in all the gate." That shadowy, impalpable, intangible something which fear conjures up in the hearts of so many comes in probably to decide the question.

(2) *Selfish regard for his own inheritance.* Every way the thing must have seemed undesirable to such a man, indeed to most men. Ruth was poor, so was Naomi, and he must take charge of both—a double burden. If an heir should be born, he would be called by the name of Mahlon,—if more children, the inheritance would have to be divided among many. A shrewd, selfish man would be sure to say "No" under such circumstances, and the unnamed kinsman seems to have been such. (*a*) Took no care (*b*) made no enquiries about the widows until forced to do so thus publicly. *A type of those who fear trouble and so say nothing.* Let wrong continue, fraud, want, &c., multiply and go on their way as if they were neither responsible to God or man. Note on the other hand *a danger from excess either way.* Some will have to say at last "They made me keeper of the king's vineyard, but *mine own vineyard have I not kept.*" No man is asked to neglect his own affairs, to their serious detriment.

(3) *Want of a chivalrous and heroic spirit.* This the secret of all else. The duty was clear, but the man was living in that state when duty is only felt as a burden. Of course there were difficulties, but they were just of that kind that a true unselfish man, would be delighted to overcome. Possibly the man was a just man according to his lights (*Cox*). May have honestly doubted whether he was bound to marry Mahlon's *Moabitish* widow. Probably one of those cautious, common-place souls, who fail under severe tests, and in critical moments, when the law seems doubtful, and prudence can only discuss the question from a selfish standpoint, and who fail just *for want of that larger vision, which looks at the spirit, not at the letter.* So Orpah failed where Ruth triumphed [cf. on I 14 p. 53; also on p. 60]. So Lot was led to the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, while Abraham remained with God to receive the promises (Gen. xiii. 10—17). So the kinsman as contrasting with Boaz. So the "child of sense" always as contrasting with the child of the spirit. Note! *The reluctance and inability of the mere natural man to undertake and effect the work of doing and suffering* (*Wordsworth*).

Look II. At some of the certain results of his action.

His name is studiously avoided in the Scriptures, simply called "such a one," almost an epithet of contempt. Note. *There is an over-cautious, calculating selfishness which misses its mark by over-shrewdness.*

This man sought fame and the remembrance a large inheritance would give, and this is what he found—feared that his "name" would be cut off from Israel, and his inheritance marred, since his children would be called by the name of another, and so *he denied himself and let another go down to posterity as redeemer.* Curious he is unnamed in the very book which recounts his story. We know him simply as the "anonymous kinsman" (*Cox*). His miserable, narrow policy brought its own defeat, while Boaz, who had no such selfish desire or ambition, lives in the pages of inspiration as the ancestor of Christ Himself. Note. *A principle in this.* Impossible that men should live both for the present and future, in many senses. The immediate policy often seems best when it is a

selfish one, a narrow, degraded one. But wait! True, men exist from day to day by care and industry, but they live to posterity by virtue of unselfish and heroic deeds. There is a losing the life which is a saving it. Live to yourself and you perish with the present, but live for others, and the memory will be fresh and fragrant when you have passed away. Men speedily forget everything but goodness.

"Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust."—*Shirley.*

IMPROVEMENT. (1) The desire for fame natural to the human breast. Nothing so wrong in it after all. The desire to leave an inheritance behind not uncommon—not to be condemned of itself. The whole question is as to how the accomplishment of these desires is pursued, whether (a) To the forgetfulness of other claims and duties as here; (b) To the neglect of others' rights. Then be sure it is a short-sighted policy, seen through by men, condemned of God? Best to do our duty, and leave the question of fame and heritage, as everything else, with Him!

(2) "If souls be made of earthly mould
Let them love gold;
If born on high,
Let them unto their kindred fly."—*Herbert.*

(3) What is a hard duty to the worldling may show itself a delightful pleasure to the good man—to the man of God.

(4) *Lest I mar mine inheritance.* (1) How easy to do this. (2) In how many ways it may be done—ways of which we have no conception at the time. Striving to save it we may lose it, as this man did. (3) How many do this? (*a*) Ruin health, (*b*) lose reputation, (*c*) make the estate bankrupt, (*d*) cast faith aside, etc.

"How very ready are we to acknowledge duties which are likely to benefit ourselves."—*Macartney*

"This person readily owned himself Elimelech's near relation and next kinsman, when the remnant of his property was to be got, and then he had plenty of money for the redemption: but when other duties were presented to him—when he was reminded that there were widows to be cherished, as well as fields to be grasped—then he discovered the danger to his own inheritance."—*Macartney.*

"This makes many shy of the great redemption, they are not willing to espouse religion. Heaven they could be glad of, but holiness they can dispense with; it will not agree with the lust they have already espoused and therefore let who will purchase Heaven at what rate they cannot."—*M. Henry.*

"When a man finds that he is living from conscience, and not from trust and love and peace; when he finds that he has not spontaneity nor generous impulses any more, he feels that he is going down to the lower level; and he is asking every day, "What is it my duty to do?" He does not get any higher than this. It is a sign of great retrogression. It is a sign that a man has lost the liberty of a son of God. It is a sign that he is no longer a friend, but a servant. He feels like doing his duty and that is all."—*Beecher.*

"Go out with me to-day into the woods, where the white oak is, and where the beech is. Their leaves died last November, but they all hang on the trees yet. The trees have not strength enough to slough them. They always make me think of a great many people. Sap does not run in them any more, but their duties hang on them like dead leaves all over. They would not like to drop their duties; they are not quite in that state yet; but those duties are dry, sapless, and enforced"—*Ibid.*

"Ho, such a one!" The name of the kinsman who feared to mar his own inheritance is blotted out, whilst the name of him who was willing to marry the stranger and the outcast, has been transmitted to honorable remembrance. In like manner the name of the beggar has been left on perpetual record, whilst the name of the rich man at whose gate he lay has utterly perished."—*Elliot.*

"The Muse of History does not trouble herself with useless names, but lets them drop into a congenial oblivion, and if compelled to record some facts about them, uses such a slightly contemptuous epithet—"Such a one." A poor immortality that almost worse than utter neglect."—*Bradex.*

"The Pyramids of Egypt, selfishly reared it is thought, to perpetuate the fame of the mighty monarchs that built them, refuse to whisper their ambitious names; but the poor widow, who, without thinking of fame, silently dropped her two mites into the temple treasury, and the weeping penitent who, in the prodigality of her great love anointed the feet of her Savour with her precious spikenard, shall, wherever the gospel is preached to the end of time, have these acts spoken of for a memorial of them. In the highest sense, every true act of goodness is immortal."—*Thomson.*

"If kinsmen dwell together, and one of them

die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry outside [i.e. outside the family circle], unto a stranger; her husband's kinsman shall go unto her, and take her to wife and perform the duty of a husband's kinsman unto her. And it shall be that the first-born whom she beareth shall stand upon the name [i.e. take the place, or arise in the place] of the kinsman who is dead, that his name be not wiped out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his kinsman's wife, then let his kinsman's wife go up to the gate, unto the elders, and say, 'my husband's kinsman refuseth to raise up unto his kinsman a name in Israel; he will not do the duty of my husband's kinsman.' Than the elders of the city shall call him, and speak unto him; and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; then shall his kinsman's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe, from off his feet, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, 'so let it be done unto the man who will not build up his kinsman's house.' And his name shall be called in Israel, House of the shoe taken off."—Deut. xxv. 5-10.

VERSE 9.

Theme.—THE KINSMAN REDEEMER.

"The man most man, with tenderest human hands
Works best for man, . . . as God in Nazareth.—*Mrs. Browning.*

Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, etc.

Charity should begin at home, with that which is nearest. So redemption, deliverance must work along the same lines, from the same centre. In every way the claims of the nearest are first. How far Boaz recognised the force of this law may be seen in his respect for the rights of the nearest kinsman [cf. on iii. 12, 13; iv 3, 4]. That failing only, the welcomed claim falls upon himself [cf. also Jer. xxxii. 7, 8, etc.].

The same law is recognised and followed in the world-wide schemes of redemption. God is our Father, what nearer relationship can there be than this? Christ the elder brother. *And in this link between the human and the Divine* is the reason for the incarnation at Bethlehem, the agony at Gethsemane, the sacrifice at Calvary. *He was redeeming his own.* The sin was in the flesh, and the payment must be in the flesh. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, etc. (cf. Heb. ii. 14—16). More emphatically still is this law of kinship asserting itself on our behalf laid down in the epistle to the Galatians. The "children" are represented as seen "in bondage under the elements of the world," Then when the "fulness of the time" had come, "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law. To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. iv. 3-5). The whole belongs to the family economy, the family arrangements for bringing back and buying back its own. Hence it is the spirit of Anti-Christ to say that Christ has not come in the flesh—a blow at the very foundation truth of the gospel—a denial of the one and only hope of humanity.

Notice then with regard to the office of this Kinsman Redeemer.

I. It was not an arbitrary institution. It was one resting upon principles inherent to man, that help comes or should come from those nighest to us.

1. *It was reasonable.* Founded upon the reason of things, and working in harmony with all that essentially belongs to the idea of human society. The family estate remained unimpaired because of it for any considerable length of time, and was kept from passing to others. The Hebrews would not lose a single family, or branch of the family if they could help it—a wise and statesman-like arrangement. [cf. also ii, 20, 21; p. 140.]

So in the wider sphere. Sin has brought disorder, alienation, loss of heritage, into the midst of the great family of God. But *are there no remedial processes that spring out of the family life and bond?* To deny this possibility is to deny every

hope of humanity, and can belong to a creed born only of despair. No doubt as to the Scriptural answer to the question. They remembered that God was their Rock and the high God their Redeemer (Psalm lxxviii, 35.) Christ hath redeemed, etc. (Gal. iii. 13). Ye are bought with a price (1 Cor. vii. 23). Cf. also 1 Peter 18, 19; 1 Tim. ii. 6; Matt. xx. 28; Mark x. 45, etc., etc. And, however, we explain the utterance of Job (xix. 25) it has this great hope of humanity underlying it. I know that my goel is not cut off, but liveth ever to make intercession for me; he will not forsake me, but will stand at the latter day upon the earth, having redeemed for me my forfeited possession, etc. (*Macartney's Trans.*)

2. *It was necessitated.* That is if the family tree be kept with all its branches flourishing. There must be some way of providing for lost and forfeited inheritances. So as between God and man, the scheme of redemption springs out of the necessities of the case, and is but the outcome of the character of God Himself, and His love for His alienated children.

3. *It was legally and technically right.* An express provision of the law. Law indeed in its best sense is only the endeavour to fix these great principles of human nature and give them expression. Note. (1) *Law is not enough for the law might and must fail at times as it did here.* Either it absolved this kinsman, as Lange thinks, or it was too weak to carry out its own demands of him in the face of a popular superstition [see last outline]. (2) *Love alone can truly undertake to redeem.* (*a*) Looks through the letter into the spirit. The spirit of the law entirely on Ruth's side even if the letter were against her [see Crit. and Exeg. notes]. (*b*) Rises superior to all thought of fear. (*c*) Works promptly and willingly as here. One passage alone will show how completely the gospel scheme of *redemption* is in harmony with this, God so *loved*, etc. (John iii. 16).

4. *It was Divinely sanctioned* [cf. Deut. xxv, 5—10; Lev. xxv, 47—54].

II. It was not a mere passing custom, but one involving and foreshadowing glorious truths. Truly and in the deepest sense of the word a type—a figure of still better things to come.

See how significant the work of a goel is to those who believe in the redemption by Jesus Christ. *His first duty was to purchase those who were otherwise lost.* So with ourselves. We were "sold under sin," "led captive of the devil." But He came, gave Himself a ransom, bought us with His own blood, &c. [1 Peter i. 18, 19; Heb. ix. 12—15; Eph, i. 7, &c.]. *The second duty was to redeem the forfeited inheritance.* The creature and the creation groan and are in travail, but they are redeemed and shall be delivered [Rom. viii. 20]. Man was made heir and lord over all (Gen. i. 26—31; Ps. viii. 6). He is now only living as a discrowned monarch. But we see Jesus, the Apostle says (Heb. ii. 5—9), and in Him we have the hope of the final redemption of all things. *The third duty was to protect and take to Himself.* The concept of the Almighty as the Goel or Redeemer of Israel is a very common one in the Scriptures [Is. xlix. 7, liii. 3, liv, 8, &c.]. So with Christ and the Church [see next outline]. Note. *Christ is the Goel or Redeemer whose shoe is never drawn off* (*Wordsworth*). His work of Redemption is for eternity (*Ibid*).

IMPROVEMENT. (1) How completely love is the fulfilling of the law! (2) And even where the law fails love triumphs. (3) We have here redemption (a) proposed, (b) accomplished, (c) applied.

"And if the name of Redeemer be dear to us, conveying, as it does merely the idea of a benevolent person, who, by purchase, delivers a poor bondsman from servitude, how much dearer will it be when we find it setting forth to us the brotherhood into which the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, enters with his best creatures, and the watchful, patients care which he exercises over them."—*Macartney.*

"Our ancestors by corrupting the spirit and blood of humanity brought upon the Son of Man his sore travail. The degeneracy of the race is His humiliation. What ever reproach He may suffer, He will be numbered with transgressors, that through his straightness he may breack their bonds, and restore the integrity of their nature. He must redeem men 'because He is the Son of Man.' . . . . The great secret of Christ's power over men lies in the fact that in Him humanity is Divine. On the ground of his supreme humanity,

nothing is more natural than that He should say 'I will draw all men unto me' . . . . His drawing power was always in principle the same, 'I drew them with cords of a man' (Hosea xi. 4,) . . . . In His descent into our earthly human condition He becomes himself the first example of his own law. "*Thou mayest not set a stranger over thee which is not thy brother.*' (Deut. xvii. 15,) Does not the Highest Authority for this law vanish if we deny the humanity of the Son of God?"—*Pulsford.*

"The kinship with the redeemed in short, is an invariable law and condition of redemption. And this law holds of the Divine Goel. 'Forasmuch as we were partakers of flesh and blood Christ also himself took part in the same.' 'None but a man could be the Goel of men. No alien, no stranger, could interpose for us; only 'the Man who is near of kin to us, our nearest kinsman.' Hence the Son of God became the Son of Man."—*Cox.*

"Will the vexed accursed humanity
As worn by Him, begin to be
A blessed, yea, a sacred thing
For love and awe and ministering?"
Mrs. Browning.

"Under this manifold and most appropriate image we have presented to us the supreme facts in the moral history of the world, the truths which have most profoundly entered into our spiritual experiences. No poor Hebrew who had been compelled to part with the fields he had inherited from his father suffered a loss comparable with ours, when, by sin, we had lost the righteousness, the right relation to God and man, in which we were originally placed by the Father of our spirits. No Hebrew sold, or selling himself, for a slave to a hard and alien master ever endured a bondage half so bitter and shamefnl as that into which we fell when, sold under sin, we sank into bondage to our lusts. No deliverance wrought by a Hebrew Goel is worthy to be compared with that by which Christ has made it possible for us to subdue our evil passions and lusts and to possess ourselves of a righteousness more stable, and more perfect."—*Cox.*

"Kinsmen." Lit. Goels. The distinction between this and other words used to designate one near of kin, is that whereas the latter denotes only relationship, this implies certain defined rights and obligations. The rights of the Goel who was the nearest living blood relation, consisted (1) in the redemption of the inheritance, and when, he had sold himself into slavery, of the person of him who was near of kin to him, (2) in his claim to restitution or satisfaction for wrong done to such an one, when he left no son behind him, and (3) in the avenging the blood of such an one in the case of murder if intentional, and even if accidental, provided the manslayer were found without the precincts of the cities of refuge."—*Elliot.*

VERSE 10.

Theme.—THE BRIDEGROOM REDEEMER.

"Love he sent to bind
The disunited tendrils of that vine
Which bears the wine of life, the human heart."—*Shelley.*

"But now possession crowns endeavour,
I took her in my heart, to grow
And fill the hollow place for ever."—*Jean Ingelow.*

Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess have I purchased . . . to be my wife.

Ruth's recompense now is to be plainly and openly manifested. As with the wise men who sought they knew not what, she, too, had seen the star in the East, and followed it she knew not where. Faith had sustained her. With sublime, heroic self-denial, leaving all behind, she had said to Naomi, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." She had come to find neglect and penury in Israel, to be a lonely gleaner in the hot sun, known and pointed at as the Moabitish woman who came back with Naomi. Her virtue evident, and not unknown in the gate; whatever claims she had upon kinsmen had been ignored, because she was one of an "accursed race." That which should have come to her unsought, she has not merely to demand, but to seek for and plead for (iii. 9) "Spread thy wing over thine handmaid for thou art a near kinsman." And when her noble-hearted protector had demanded public justice for her the claim had been repudiated. But the path of the just shines none the less towards the perfect day because of obstacles like these. There was one generous spirited man in Israel at least who had marked her virtue, her self-respect, shining con-

spicuously, not only in the harvest field, but even during the difficult and delicate interview in the threshing floor. And now he shelters her under the spreading wings of his own fair name and social position, rejected as she is, takes her to himself before all. Did ever fiction conceive a more fitting climax to so sweet a story? "Marriage is honourable" everywhere and in all ages, where more so than here?

I. Marriage is honorable because of principles to be seen and illustrated here.—(1) *The relationship openly acknowledged.* A most important thing this, which, if refused, can only be refused from mean and sinister motives. Clandestine marriages a fruitful source of misery. Why should there be any reason for not acknowledging the relationship entered upon before all? Boaz was not ashamed of Ruth, although she was *a Moabitess*. Not ashamed even of the peculiar motives which prompted his conduct. Nor will any true man be. Note. *If there be cause to be ashamed of the moment's confession, why should he seek a life-long companionship?* Love may begin in secret, but ends in being confessed openly.

(2). *Publicly recognised.* "We are witnesses," they said. (*a*) Enforces fidelity, (*b*) gives legal protection, (*c*) secures permanence to the relationship, (*d*) hands down a good name to the children, and preserves them from the finger of scorn. Note. *He that tampers with the institution of marriage touches the ark of God* (*Thomson*) cf. Gen. ii. 18, 21-25. [See also on "Marriages in Moab," ch. i. 4, pp. 26-28.]

(3) *Solemnly ratified.* (*a*) With prayer. The Lord make, etc. What is religion intended for if it is not to come in at times like this? The secularisation of marriage means the separation of human life from divine things at its most solemn moments. A sorry match that has no prayer breathed over it, a disastrous beginning likely to have a worse end (*Braden*). Rather our religion should come in the more, to touch life and humanity everywhere, on all sides. Note. *The prayers here are not official prayers*, but those of the people, the elders and inhabitants of the city. (*b*) With lavish professions of good will, neighbourly expressions of esteem, desires for prosperity, etc. Ruth, indeed, taken with the approval and acclamation of the people—a truly Eastern picture. Note. *The sanction of Christianity must ever rest upon kindred scenes.* Christ's first miracle was wrought at a marriage-feast.

II. Marriage is honorable because of what it is used to illustrate and shadow forth. The inspired Word has put honour by making it to express, represent, and illustrate some of the kindred relationships between God and man. (*a*) *Between Israel and Jehovah*: "Thy Maker is thy husband" (Isa. liv. 5); (*b*) *between Christ and the Church* (Eph. v. 25; Rev. xxi. 2). Note *Relationships below are often only the faint shadow of grander relationships above.* What else can we expect when man himself was made in the image of God (Gen. i, 27). So Moses was commanded to make the tabernacle according to the pattern God showed him in the Mount.

In the union of Ruth the Moabitess with Boaz, of Bethlehem, the future birth-place of Christ, we have a foreshadowing of the mystical union and marriage between Christ and the Gentile world, and of the junction of Jew and Gentile in one body in Him (*Wordsworth*). Certainly the incident very beautifully illustrates Christ's dealings with those who were once alien and reprobate. (1) *He takes them to Himself*, just as Ruth was taken in her lowly estate and poverty a Moabitess. (2) *He covers them with His wing* [cf. on the Overshadowing Wing, page 119, etc.]. (3) *He clothes them with His righteousness.* Ventured the marring of his own inheritance to do this, for though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor (*M. Henry*). (4) *He redeems their inheritance*, and presents them to a more lasting heritage.

IMPROVEMENT.—How strikingly the story here exemplifies the words of Christ, "Verily, I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, etc. (Mark x. 29, 30).

"All Bethlehem seemed moved to a devout and gladsome sympathy, with an event which had such a history behind it. The little town kept holiday; and it was meet that it should do so. Far from us be that ungenial and narrow spirit, which would frown upon cheerfulness at such an hour. It is one of the marks of the Divinity of our religion that it touches our humanity on all sides. But farther still be that irreligious spirit which would degrade the marriage rite into a mere business transaction, and form a connection between two human beings for better or for worse, a union of interest and affections, of hopes and fears, so that 'they twain become one flesh,' and only the grave has power to break the bond with less of deliberation and solemnity than men usually display in the sale or the purchase of an animal. Surely the formation of the marriage bond pre-eminently ought to be 'sanctified by the word of God and by prayer.'"—*Thomson.*

"Love is the best investment of all, save conscience and the sentiment of duty. These are the treasure-houses of life, the great market wherein the shares are always rising. The step can be easily taken, but never retraced. It brings with it, in all cases, additional sorrows as well as joys. The freedom of the man and woman is thereby in a certain sense limited and curtailed. Then each has to think not alone of self, but, also, and as much, if not more of another. Each has to act, not with a view to personal comfort and ease, but with the loving purpose of contributing all possible satisfaction and joy to another's life."—*Braden.*

"And may our love be ne'er a trailing robe,
To clog our feet along our heavenward way,
But a warm garment for our daily use.
Marriage is but for earth, but holy love
Will live in Heaven. Let us ever strive,
To grow more like to God—for God is love.'
—*Mrs. Browning*

VERSES 11—22.

CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 11. We are witnesses. The business settled without lawyers or legal casuistry (*A. Clarke*). The Lord make. The birth of children looked upon as a direct interference of Providence—a contribution to the fulfilment of the great promise whereon their hearts were set (*E. Price*). Like Rachel and like Leah. The two ancestresses of all true Israelites. Like Ruth they had left home for their husbands. The younger probably mentioned first not only as the favourite wife, but as connected with Bethlehem (Gen. xxxv. 19; Jer. xxxi. 15). Do thou worthily [manfully]. Lit. make thou strength or power. In Ephratah. Some distinguished Ephratah as the country, Bethlehem as the town (*Bernard, Price*). And be famous in Bethlehem. Lit. call a name. Get a name (*Lange*). Meant "act the noble part" (*Morison*). The real force of the whole phrase is "Be thou influential in the growth of thy wealth, and be well spoken of as far as thy influence may be made to extend" (*E. Price*). These words are prophetic, for thence came the birth of Him who has made Bethlehem famous in all the world (*Theodoret*).

Ver. 12. Like the house of Pharez [Gen. xxxviii. 29; 1 Chron. ii. 4; Matt. i. 3.] The second son of Judah (Numb. xxvi. 20) and one of the ancestors of Boaz. His family was more illustrious and numerous than that of his brother Zarah. Perez also was a son of Tamar, who, although a very different character than Ruth, resembled her in history in that she suffered injustice in having the rights of marriage withheld from her [see *Lange* in loco.]

Ver. 13. The Lord gave her. By a special blessing Boaz advanced in years (*Wordsworth*). A son. The kinsman's superstitious fears [see on v. 6] now shown to be groundless.

Ver. 14. Blessed be the Lord. Another rythmical sentence [cf. i. 16, p. 66; also cp. Luke i. 46—55; 68—79, etc.] Not left thee this day without a kinsman [redeemer.] Thy grandson (*Wordsworth*). So *Lange* and *Morison*. Not so, Boaz (*Speaker's Com.*). Obed would inherit the estate of Elimelech, and so he is the real goel of Naomi. The grammatical construction also points to Obed, "the restorer, nourisher, &c.," as well as the phrase "this day." That his name may be. And may his name be (*Lange*).

Ver. 15. And he shall be [may he be] a restorer.....nourisher. Trueliterally in her case, true spiritually to all the world by Him who was born at Bethlehem of this seed according to the flesh (*Theodoret*). Better to thee than seven sons. Cf. 1 Sam. i. 8; ii. 5, for similar expressions. The women acknowledge now how far short the legal friendship of Israel towards Naomi has fallen in comparison with the self-sacrifice of the daughter of Moab (*Lange*). The prospect now presented of her becoming the tribe mother of a numerous and flourishing family (*Keil*).

Ver. 17. Her neighbours gave it a name. Besides this he doubtless received a name from his parents (*Lange*). This of the women continued and inserted in the family genealogy, because seen to be appropriate (*ibid*). Obed, servant—*i.e.*, of the Lord (*Wordsworth, Gesen. Targ.*) Because he served to gladden Naomi's old age (*Steele and Terry*). Serving or worshipping (*Elliot*). Must be understood in the sense of serving as a son [see *Lange* in loco.] Obed in the sense of "one that serves," harmonises well with the words in v. 15 (*Bertheau.*)

Ver. 18. Now these are the generations. The table presents ten names. A round number, suggesting, it may be, that unimportant ones have been omitted. The scribes were accustomed to do this both to ease their own labour of transcription, and to give additional emphasis to the

names appearing in the received list (*E. Price*) [see Introduction, p. 4, 5.]. Boaz. Not Mahlon, as might have been expected from the Levirate law. David. Why end with this name if the book were written, as Bertheau, Davidson, and others seem to think, long after the time of Solomon? Points possibly to a reason, if he were reigning as king.

VERSES 11—13.

Theme.—PRAYERS FOR POSTERITY AND PROSPERITY.

Patience and abnegation of self, and devotion to others,
This was the lesson a life of trial and sorrow had taught her.
So was her love diffused, but, like to some odorous spices,
Suffered no waste nor loss, though filling the air with aroma.—*Longfellow.*

The Lord make the woman, etc. And let thy house, etc. So Boaz took Ruth, etc.

Good wishes are to be regarded as prayers before God, but those of a people ("all the people") as the effectual fervent prayer which availeth much (*E. Price*). Good to keep the heart in readiness, so as to resolve our common emotions of sympathy into benedictions as here. How long did this blessing rest over the house of Boaz?—until Christ came? The best seal to a compact like this found in prayers like these which stretch out towards generations yet unborn.

I. We have the general truth taught here. That the love of posterity may be used of God and sanctified. How the Hebrew idea of "children, a blessing from the Lord" expresses itself in these devout prayers. Note. *All natural emotions and tendencies may be worked by the Divine wisdom into the great scheme of Providence and grace* (*E. Price*). The Incarnation, the direct issue and product of preceding conditions. God glorifying what is good in the race, the noble spirit of Boaz, the virtue of Ruth, the prayers of these devout Israelites, all leading upwards, onwards, toward the Christ that is to be. (1) How wonderful! (2) How suggestive! Who knows what His purposes may be through our children, if we are faithfully consecrating them to Him? Men make much of a pious ancestry. What if we look in the other direction, and have faith, and use the privilege of prayer aright?

II. The particular truth is taught here: That a Moabitess is thus introduced among the progenitors of our Lord Himself. Cf. Matt. i. 5. Boaz begat Obed of Ruth. A memorable fact. A Gentile woman thus rendered a constituent portion of the Redeemer's genealogy (*E. Price*). Why? (1) *To indicate the heathen were not quite forgotten under the old dispensation* severe and exclusive as it was (*Ibid*). (2) To emphasise the fact that *God has always appeared to work by what at some times might be regarded as contraries.* (3) *To remove the suspicion* from the sceptic *that the Advent depended upon the mere natural course of events* (*Ibid*). (4) To keep the devout student lovingly and reverently *dependent upon the unerring though mysterious will of the Most High* (*Ibid*).

Theme.—CHILDREN THE GIFT OF HEAVEN.

E. Price on *The seed which the Lord shall give thee.*

The Jewish idea may be modified by us, that the number of children measures a man's felicity. Yet the truth, underlying it, continues with us: viz., that pious descendants are always the greatest blessings which the great Father can bestow upon us.

Do they not bind us to heaven by sanctified affections?

Do they not sweeten home sympathies?

Do they not exemplify the advantages of that saintly education, they are supposed to be susceptible of?

Do they not become the best support of the declining years of a happy parent?

Do they not assure prosperity to a spiritual church? And *do* they not thus hand down the tradition of the faith unimpaired?

In this sense, then, "blessed is the man who has his quiver full of them."

"The man has acted both unselfishly and honourably in upholding the family custom of Israel. The public therefore, praise him and wish him good. Such applause is both desirable and profitable. The actions of a good man are fit subjects for praise. It stimulates us to higher deeds when we recognise nobleness in others. It encourages them in acts of generosity and honour. If any around us do wise, thoughtful, open-hearted, unselfish deeds, let us not fear to praise them."—*Braden.*

"What fame would be acquired in Israel by the kindness of Boaz to Ruth and Naomi? Was it to be hoped that his goodness and bounties to them would be known and praised among all the tribes? It is natural for men to think that the actions which they admire, should be known and admired by all. The hopes of these good women were, perhaps, more sanguine than the case could justify; and yet they were more than realised. The name of Boaz became famous through all Israel, and will continue famous among the Gentiles also, while the world lasts, because it is mentioned with honour in the Book of God. Both bad and good actions are often published to a greater extent, and continue longer to be known, than the doers or any of their friends expected."—*Lawson.*

"The godly are members one of another, therefore must needs have a fellow-feeling . . . . but let this be with them in lawful things, for charity rejoiceth not in iniquity. What joy can it be to a godly man to see his friend rich and in glory by usury, bribery, oppression, deceit and fraud?"—*Bernard.*

"It is one of the grand aims of divine revelation to produce this state of mind [the habitual recognition of God]; and in the case of this people it evidently had produced it. Religion was an all-pervading life. . . . It penetrated everywhere, like the sunlight. God was beheld as the Cause of causes; His Hand was visible in every occurrence; He was a felt Presence."—*Dr. A. Thompson.*

VERSE 11.

Theme.—MANLINESS, ITS FIT AND PROPER SPHERE.

"The world waits
For help. Beloved, let us love so well,
Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work."—*Mrs. Browning.*

Do thou worthily [*manfully*] *in Ephratah and be famous* [*get a name*] *in Bethlehem.*

The world wants men, always has done so; did so even thus early in its history—men who play the worthy, manful part. Such will always (1) be well spoken of, (2) desired and longed for, (3) in the highest sense "make the best of both worlds." Note. (1) *Honour, the respect and esteem of others*, not to be despised as cynics would teach, rather to be sought for in legitimate ways as in the sight of God. [cf. Ps. i., cxii., Job xxix., Prov. iv. 8, 9, etc.] (2) *To be truly a man and play the manly part includes all virtues*, or should do so. (*a*) *So on the gentler side.* To be human is to be humane, and should be thus understood always. Note. Impossible to be noble in character without tenderness, gentleness, compassionateness, etc. (*b*) *So on the sterner side.* The root idea of the word virtue is strength. The strong man, self-contained, self-balanced, having the mastery over his passion, is the virtuous man. This seemingly the idea of the text, "Act the part of a true man, a strong man." A right worthy exhortation for such an occasion.

I. The sphere of this manly part. *At home*—in Ephratah, Bethlehem. Do good among thy own people [Ezk. xviii. 18], be public-spirited, though to private disadvantage (*Trapp*). So in Christ's charge to His disciples, these home claims and duties are not forgotten. "Beginning at Jerusalem," He said. Note. *Easy to ignore this aspect of duty*—like Jonah, to flee to Tarshish from the Nineveh God has pointed out, but this is the Divine idea. "Begin at home." "Shine there."

consecrate that. "Return to thine own house and shew how great things God hath done unto thee" (Luke viii. 39). Note. *A difficult duty this always*, as with Eli, Noah, Lot, Judah [cf. Genesis xxxviii; Song of Sol. i, 6].

II The results of this manly part. *Be famous*, etc. The two things linked together, the doing worthily and the fame that follows it. Note. *All other ways of making a reputation valueless.* Great reputations are to be obtained by great merits, by saying well and doing well, by wise speech and wise actions, by being useful and serviceable in our own day and generation. Note (*a*) *A great name often not so much to be coveted, "but a good name is better than precious ointment"* (*Lawson*). (*b*) The common and vulgar ideas of fame, glory, martial renown, etc., not encouraged here. It is *fame won at home* of which the text speaks.

"Home is the most appropriate sphere for Christian usefulness. It is the place where true piety is ever tested, and false piety soonest put to the blush. It has the first claims upon the man of God, whatever his public position may be. And yet how often is this forgotten or ignored. Eli, priest of the Living God, can enter into the Holiest place and stand before the Shekinah glory in the manifested presence of Deity itself, and yet he cannot order his household aright, or protect the sanctuary of the Most High from the pollution of his children. But it is not so with the truly devout and consecrated spirit. As master, or as servant, in the workshop and in the counting house, it is there his Christ-like character shines to best advantage; it is there, by the quiet influence which belongs to every life, the noblest testimony is borne for God. The household is hallowed, the home life consecrated, the private walks sanctified, the neighbourhood blessed by the sweet and gentle aroma of a holy and heavenly life."—*B*

"A name truly good is the aroma from a virtuous character. It is a spontaneous emanation from genuine excellence. It is a reputation for whatsoever things are honest and lovely, and of good report. It is such a name as is not only remembered on earth but written in heaven. Just as a box of spikenard is not only valuable to its possessor, but pre-eminently precious in its diffusion; so, when a name is really good, it is of unspeakable service to all who are capable of feeling its aspiration."—*Hamilton.*

"But there are deeds which should not pass away,
And names that must not wither, though the earth
Forgets her empire with a just decay.
The enslavers and the enslaved, their death and birth,
The high, the mountain majesty of worth
Should be, and shall, survivors of its woe,
And from its immortality look forth
In the sun's face, like yonder Alpine snow,
Imperishably pure beyond all things below."
—*Byron.*

VERSES 14, 15.

Theme.—CONGRATULATIONS AND GOOD WISHES.

The soul of music slumbers in the shell,
Till waked and kindled by the master's spell;
And feeling hearts, touch them but rightly, pour
A thousand melodies unheard before.—*Rogers.*

Blessed be the Lord which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman.

The birth of a son and heir an important event always; more especially in an eastern household, and with one of the age and position of Boaz. A memorable day this, too, in the history of Israel. Another link added in the chain Christward. The joy here an earnest of the joy hereafter, the barriers of national pride broken down in part; prophetic of that glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill towards men (Luke ii. 14). Note. *First prayer here* (*v.* 11) *now praise.* Blessed, etc.

In these congratulations there is I. A glance at the new circumstances surrounding Naomi. As much our duty to rejoice with those who rejoice as to weep with those who weep. (*a*) We should enter into their plans (*b*), sympathise in their successes (*c*), rejoice especially at their unexpected prosperity, as here. Note (1) *We cannot help doing this if we encourage that which is good in ourselves.* God

made men to sympathise with each other, only that sin has made them selfish and envious.

(2) *Man's duty is to respond to these Divinely implanted instincts.* Our good wishes are not worth much unless they find utterance or expression in some way. Here the joy not only felt but avowed. "The women are, as is usual in such times, full of expressive sympathy. That is quite a touch of nature."—(*Braden.*)

There is **II. A glance heavenward.** The Lord, etc. The joy of the godly has this holy and religious expression naturally and always. Especially should we look upward in these moments of family rejoicing. Note. *Whatever joy men may give us, praise is due to God, who thus makes them the instruments of his benefits.*

Right again that this devout feeling should find expression. Is it that our homes are to be made glad with his gifts, and our hearts with the sunshine of his presence, and no sign be seen of the gladness which is there? A holy and profitable way of gossiping this; God praised and called upon (*Trapp*). Note. *The blessings of the Old Testament generally of a material character* (*Kitto*). Yet they are not the less often the source of spiritual joy (cf. Isa. xxiii).

III. A glance toward the future. He shall be unto thee, etc. (v. 15). Why to Naomi especially? Are we not to see in this her reward for all the past? Note. (*a*) *Those are to be comforted most by us who have been most humbled.* They need it most, and we should be ready to speak the word of consolation. A poor Christian who has no word of congratulation for a time like this! (*b*) *A joyous prospect may open suddenly even for the sorrowing and the aged.* Call me not Naomi, she had said (I. 20). But God can send light at eventide. [See next outline].

E. Price on this: *Theme.*—A GOOD CHILD.

Women do not always babble vain things. How quick are they to apprehend the modifications of our domestic life.

Study, then, the portrait of a good son, which they offer here.

God must have given him.

God adapts him to special needs.

God makes him felt as a comforter (Heb., a Redeemer).

God in him restores exhausted life.

God secures the true honour of the family.

And God thus "nourishes" old age, till it be resolved into heaven. Yes! God *is* in all!

Let parents pray, labour, and educate for this high end.

Let children see to it that their welcomed presence around the hearth may secure it.

And let "our gossips" even change their idle talk into kind congratulations and earnest prayers.

"It would seem as if there was already a kind of joyous foretaste of the birth and infancy which, in after times, was to be for ever associated with the name of Bethlehem. It was the first appearance on the scene of what may by anticipation be called, even then, the Holy Family, for that child was Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. Nor is it a mere genealogical connexion between the two generations. The very licence and independence of the age may be said to have been the means of introducing into the ancestry of David and of the Messiah an element which else would have been, humanly speaking, impossible. 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation' (Deut. xxiii. 3; Ezra ix. 1; Neh. xiii. 1). This was the letter of the law, and, in the greater strictness that prevailed after the return from the captivity, it was rigidly enforced. But in the isolation of Judah from the rest of Israel, in the doing of every man what was right in his own eyes, the more comprehensive spirit of the whole religion overstepped the letter of a particular enactment."—*Stanley.*

VERSES 15, 16.

Theme.—YOUTH AND AGE.

"O thou bright thing fresh from the hand of God.
* * * * * *
Nearer I seem to God when looking on thee:
'Tis ages since He made His youngest star;
His hand was on thee as 'twere yesterday."—*Alexander Smith.*

He shall be to thee a restorer of thy life, etc. ***And Naomi took the child, etc.***

How often the children are messengers of God, bringing new life into the household as here. There is a fountain of love enclosed in the heart of the aged, and it only needs the tiny infant fingers of some dear one's child to unloose it. Note. *The birth of a new spirit may come in the home with the new life.* New consecration to God, new sympathy with all around. "Children are a heritage from the Lord." (*a*) What sacredness should surround them, (*b*) what prayers ascend for them, (*c*) what blessedness be found in them! Note. *If a man do not find his joy in the home, he will find his burden there.*

Dwell on, I. What the children expect from us. (*a*) Care, (*b*) attention, (*c*) protection, (*d*) love, (*e*) nurture and training. In the text Naomi seen as responding to these demands. Her name still descriptive of her character [cf. on I. 2, p. 14]. Must be doing something. Felt that she had a duty which was no burden but a pleasure. "Took the child," etc. Note. (*a*) *Whoever was once capable of true love preserves its power for ever after* (*Lange*). And life all the way through finds a sphere for it. Even in old age, when the maternal instinct may have been thought to have almost died out, Naomi becomes a foster-mother. So generally. Grandchildren not loved less, but sometimes more than the children themselves. Note. (*b*) *Love may grow more intense, even as the shadows of death begin to fall around.* What a tribute to and foreshadowing of its immortality.

II. What we expect of the children. (1) *They are to be the restorers of life and joy.* "He shall be," etc. Life intended to have this twofold, and reciprocal action and aspect. We do not give more than we get, if the true conception of God's word and of our nature be carried out. Love brings its own reward. (2) *They are to be the supports of old age.* "And a nourisher," etc. The conditions will be reversed by-and-bye. Weakness coming on with us as strength grows with them. Then this new law is to come into operation. They are to succour and cherish in return for the past, as the trembling infirmities of second childhood claim us as their own. Beautiful, divine idea, which sin and selfishness may mar, but cannot altogether destroy! The old and the feeble never forgotten, but reaping then what they have sowed in the tears and joys, the sorrows and cares, and fond affections lavished upon childhood and infancy.

IMPROVEMENT.—So the Church is to foster young converts. In return they will become sooner or later her strength and support. Note. *Spiritual children bring a greater blessing to her than "seven sons" according to the flesh* (*Lange*).

Children should nourish their old parents and supply their wants, ἀντι πελαργων. Storks and mice feed their dams when old; boughs incline and bend down towards the root; and in summer, receiving from the root leaves, flowers, and fruit, they let them fall again in winter to the fattening and nourishing of the root. Unkind and unnatural children are like kites, which, when grown strong expel their dams, and with their bills and wings beat them out of the nest."—*Trapp.*

"A certain Duke of Ormond who lost a virtuous son, the Lord Ossory, said that he would rather be the father of the dead Ossory, than of any living nobleman in England."—*Lawson.*

"It is one of the many fine points of the story, that its concluding sentences are almost wholly devoted, not to the young and happy wife and mother, but to Naomi, who had suffered so many calamities, and who, by the piety and resignation with which she bore

them, had drawn Ruth from the frivolities of Moab. It is Naomi not Ruth, whom, "the women, her neighbours," congratulate on the birth of Ruth's son. In him they see Naomi's goel—Ruth already had hers in Boaz; and they pray that, as he grows up, he may restore her to her former happiness, and be the stay and gladness of her old age. But though they speak to Naomi, and pray for her, they do not utterly forget the singular virtue of Ruth. In the words, "Thy daughter-in-law, who loveth thee, who is better to thee than seven sons," they pronounce on her an eulogy such as few "strange" women could have heard from Hebrew lips It is because the boy is Ruth's son, that he is Naomi's goel; for how can he fail to love and cherish the woman whom his mother has loved with a love even passing the love of women."—*Cox.*

"Naomi is everywhere an image of the Church of Christ, which wins, confesses, and fosters through love. Men whose natural hearts are hostile to her, become her obedient children. When there is apostacy and misery in the Church it is for priests and preachers to repent, as Naomi did, and not to excuse themselves. . . . . And how greatly she sins, when she does not rightly foster, those who do come; exhibiting neither love, nor wisdom, nor faith in her treatment of them,—that too will one day be made manifest. Impatience is not in love; and a little money does not make amends for the coldness of consummate self-righteousness."—*Lange.*

"Of Boaz himself no warrior deeds are known, and yet the greatest of Israel's heroes, the conqueror of Goliath [There is a tradition that Goliath descended from Orpah, as David from Ruth] sprang from him. He conquered himself, and on that account became the ancestor of Him who triumphed over sin and death. Similarly, Ruth had nothing but a heart full of love, and yet to her, once a daughter of Moab, there was given what neither Deborah nor Jael obtained, to become the Mother of Him by whom all the nations are redeemed."—*Ibid.*

VERSES 19—22.

Theme.—LINKS IN THE CHAIN CHRISTWARD.

"How vain are all hereditary honours,
Those poor possessions from another's deeds,
Unless our own just virtues form our title,
And give a sanction to our fond assumption."—*Shirley.*

And they called his name Obed, etc. Now these are the generations, etc.

Not a dry list of names merely useless and cumbersome as the stones of the desert. These men lived, thought, played their part in life as we do now. Think of it. Then again the names themselves, not given haphazard, but from reasons, and with a motive. Obed, for instance, means a servant, and doubtless he was called so because of the part he was to play towards Naomi and towards God.

Suggests I. The interest men take generally in genealogy. (1) *Natural.* Few men insensible or careless with regard to their ancestry, especially if it has been one which has played a noble and dignified part. (2) *Allowed and encouraged by Scripture.* The lineage of Israel for many reasons of especial and world-wide importance. (3) *May be useful as a stimulus and inspiration.*

II. The interest men take in this particular record. (1) *Because of the men themselves.* They were men of fame. Nahshon a prince in Israel; David the king, etc. (2) *Because they are links in the genealogy of Christ.* It is interesting to notice the variety of rank and condition in the ancestry of the Saviour. Rahab the harlot. Ruth the gleaner. Boaz, possibly the judge. David the king. "He who was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," touches our race at every point, and claims kindred with it all. (*A. Thomson*). Note. *How this illustrates the spiritual relationship to which Christ invites us.* (3) *Because they are helps in the study, and attestation of prophecy and of character.* How much history is condensed in such a list! Expand it, and what lessons are to be enforced! Here, for instance, Obed is called the son of Boaz after all, and not the son of Mahlon as might have been expected. Note. *Laws and customs are often borne down by the force of circumstances and of public opinion.* Is not this the reward of Boaz—the reward of faith [cf. on IV. 6]. His name stands

here contrary to the usual custom, stands as it ought to do among the ancestors of Christ himself. [See also Introduction pp. 4, 5; and on I. 2, pp. 14, 15.]

E. Price on this: *Theme.*—HERALDRY.

What a vanity these genealogies really are, although called a science, forsooth! "The pride of life" is never more exemplified than when a bad man is seen poring over the long catalogue of, it may be, worthless predecessors. A relief, then, to study one, drawn out by God Himself, and suggesting the fondest hopes of men!

From Pharez to David—what does the genealogical "tree" really suggest to us?

Why! 1. *Our descent is only valuable as it stands related to God's purpose* in Christ Jesus. What would be the real worth of David's name, if taken away from that of his great successor?

2. *That Providence marvellously works up our little lives into the grand whole of His "Counsel."* Some of these names may in themselves be worthless, yet can they not break away from God's overruling purpose!

And 3. Regarding the descent of David and of Christ the Lord as historical facts, the scheme of the Jewish "Herald" *continually reminds us of our relation to, and gratitude for, the great and glorious Redeemer of men*—Himself the son of Adam!

Names go for something, when multiplied into that of Him, who is the Alpha and the Omega of all human events!

"Obed a servant. It may be a remembrancer of duty. Just as the motto of the Prince of Wales is 'Ich Dien,' I serve. Any way it is beautiful never to despise service. 'A Christian is to be meet for the Master's use.' How many there are who are of no use in the world! Some dislike all service, and prefer the dainty hand that is never soiled, and the life that is never separated from selfishness."—*Statham.*

"Orpah, the child of sense, dismayed by the difficulties presented goes back again; Ruth, the child of the Spirit, 'persuaded' of better things, presses through all obstacles onward to join the Israel of God, and to find rest at last where rest at first had seemed impossible. So the 'anonymous kinsman,' fearing lest his name should be blotted out from Israel, his inheritance marred, his children called after another, misses the one opportunity of life and goes down to a nameless oblivion. Boaz, the man of nobler spirit, and larger faith, and keener insight, is deterred by no fear, held back by no difficulty; and, contrary to custom, we find his name here as the father of Obed, in the genealogy of David and of Christ. Is it hard to read the moral of such a story? the moral which works itself out everywhere in the pages of Inspiration, and repeats itself today in the history of a thousand lives; that sense deceives and sight fails, and cunning defeats itself; that the law is fallible and the letter kills, while faith endures and love conquers: and that only in obeying those instincts which are of God, and which spring up in hearts open to His influence, is the safety and solution of human life. This is the victory of faith, which overcomes the world and finds its name written at last in the Lamb's Book of Life for evermore."—*B.*

"O, Moab! out of thee shall come forth the unspotted Lamb which bears the sins of the world, and rules over the whole earth! From the rock of the wilderness, i.e., from Ruth, widowed by the death of her husband, Boaz derived Obed . . . . and from David came Christ."—*Jerome.*

"Much of Scripture, and still more of that which is written about Scripture, is but like the valley of dry bones to eyes of sense and sin. But if the Spirit, without whom there is no true understanding breathe upon it, whatever men say, it may live again, and that to the praise and glory of God."—*B.*

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HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOKS OF

SAMUEL.

BY

REV. W. HARRIS,

AUTHOR OF

Homiletical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs, Outlines of Sermons on Miracles and Parables of Old Testament, and Sermons for Boys and Girls.

Printed in the United States

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOKS OF SAMUEL.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Books of Samuel form but one work in the Hebrew MSS. The division was first made in the Septuagint translation, where they are reckoned as belonging to the Books of the Kings, and are called "the books of the kingdoms," "evidently with reference," says Keil, "to the fact that each of these works contains an account of the history of a double kingdom, viz., the Books of Samuel the history of the kingdoms of Saul and David, and the Books of Kings that of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel." The suitability of such a title is very obvious when we consider that the book contains an account of the establishment of the monarchy in Israel." Its *date* and *authorship* rest entirely upon conjecture, and scholars are divided in their opinions upon both subjects. The Jews believed that the first twenty-four chapters of the first book were written by Samuel himself, and that the remainder was the work of Nathan and Gad. (See 1 Chron. xxix. 29). Many modern scholars of the Anglican Church adopt this view. Keil and other commentators, however, regard it as certain that the book was not written until after the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam, and found their opinion principally upon the remark in 1 Sam. xxvii. 6, that "*Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day.*" There is internal evidence in the contents and style of the book that it was not written long after the division of the kingdom. There is, for instance, no reference to the decay of the kingdoms, and the style and language are free from the Chaldaisms of a later period. The author of the article on the "Books of Samuel," in *Smith's Biblical Dictionary*, says, "The Book of Samuel is one of the best specimens of Hebrew prose in the golden age of Hebrew literature. In prose it holds the same place which Joel and the undisputed prophecies of Isaiah hold in poetical and prophetical language. It is free from the peculiarities of the Book of Judges, and likewise from the slight peculiarities of the Pentateuch. It is a striking contrast to the Book of Chronicles, which undoubtedly belongs to the silver age of Hebrew prose; and it does not contain so many alleged Chaldaisms as the few in the Books of Kings." Upon this subject of its authorship Keil says, "Judging from the spirit of his writings, the author was a prophet of the kingdom of Judah. It is unanimously admitted, however, that he made use of written documents made by persons who were contemporaries of the events described." A reference to one such person is made in 1 Sam. i. 18, and it seems highly probable that the other sources drawn upon by the author were the works of Samuel, Gad, and Nathan, mentioned in 1 Chron. xxix. 29. "It is very evident," says Keil, "that the author had sources composed by eye-witness at command, and that these were employed with an intimate knowledge of the facts, and with historical fidelity, inasmuch as the history is distinguished by great perspicuity and vividness of description, by a careful delineation of the characters of the persons engaged, and by great accuracy in the accounts of

localities, and of subordinate circumstances connected with the historical events." The *chronology* of the events recorded in the book of Samuel in relation to those of the latter part of the book of Judges has also been a matter of some dispute. It may be stated in general that the events recorded embrace a period of about 125 years, and there is strong reason to believe that the judgeships of Eli and Samson were partly contemporaneous, and that Samuel was between twenty and thirty years old when Samson died, the work of the latter being confined entirely to the west and south-west of the kingdom. The silence of the author of the one book concerning the principal persons mentioned by the other is no argument against this view. "Notwithstanding the clear and definite account given in the Book of Judges," says Hengstenberg, "it has been too often forgotten that it was not the author's intention to give a complete history of this period, but that he only occupies himself with a certain class of events, with the acts of the Judges in a limited sense, the men whose authority among the people had its foundation in the outward deliverance which the Lord vouchsafed to the nation by their instrumentality. In this sense Eli was by no means a Judge, although in 1 Sam. iv. 18 it is said that he "*judged* Israel." Eli was High-priest, and merely exercised over the affairs of the nation a more or less extended free influence which had its origin in his priestly dignity. Hence the author of Judges had nothing to do with Eli, and we are not to conclude from the fact that he does not mention him that Eli's influence was not felt at the time of which he treats. And the author of the books of Samuel had just as little to do with Samson. His attention is fixed on Samuel, and he only mentions Eli because his history is so closely interwoven with that of Samuel. The Book of Samuel takes up the thread of history where the Book of Judges lets it fall, towards the end of the forty years' oppression by the Philistines (1 Sam. vii.). The following table is given in Lange's Commentary (English translation):—

Samson's judgeship, - - -	B.C. 1120—1100.
Eli's life (98 years) - - -	B.C. 1208—1110.
Eli's judgeship (40 years) - - -	B.C. 1150—1110.
Samuel's life, - - -	B.C. 1120 (or 1130)—1060.
Saul's reign - - - - -	B.C. 1076—1050.

But the compiler doubts "Whether we have sufficient data at present for settling the question."

The *history* contained in the Book of Samuel is the history of a great epoch in the history of the Jewish nation, and consequently of an epoch in the history of the kingdom of God upon the earth. In the language of *Dr. Erdman*, one of the authors of Dr. Lange's Commentary—"The theocracy was extricated by Samuel's labours from the deep decline pictured in the first book, and in the Book of Judges, and under the guidance of God was led by this great reformer into a new path of development. Without, under Samuel and the royal rule introduced by him, political freedom and independence of heathen powers were gradually achieved, and within, the internal theocratic covenant-relation between the people of Israel and their God was renewed and extended on the basis of the restored unity and order of political and national life by the union of the prophetic and royal offices. . . . . From the beginning of our books we see the great theocratic significance of the *prophetic order* in the history of the kingdom of Israel; in the first place, as the organ of the Divine Spirit, and the medium of the Divine guidance and control. Samuel appears here as the true founder of the Old Testament prophetic order as a permanent public power alongside of the priesthood and the kingly office. Wordsworth says, "The Book of Samuel occupies an unique place, and has a special value and interest, as revealing the kingdom of Christ.

It is the first book in Holy Scripture which declares the incarnation of Christ as King. It is the first book in Scripture which announced that the kingdom founded in Him, raised up from the seed of David, would be universal and everlasting." An examination of the book shows that the author's purpose was not to give a chronological statement of facts. It differs in this respect widely from the Books of Kings. References are made to facts assumed to be known, transactions apparently trival are narrated with great fulness, and events which generally hold a prominent place in historical works—such as great victories—are very briefly passed over. The last four chapters are not immediate historic continuations of the events related in the preceding chapters, and the history of David ceases quite abruptly, and makes it evident that the author's aim was not that of a mere historian or biographer. We conclude on this subject with some extracts from Keil's Introduction to his Commentary on this Book: "Through the establishment of the monarchy, the people of Jehovah's possession became a 'world power;' the kingdom of God was elevated into a kingdom of the world, as distinguished from other ungodly kingdoms of the world, which it was eventually to overcome in the power of its God. . . . . But the Israelitish monarchy could never thus acquire the power to secure for the kingdom of God a victory over all its foes, except as the king himself was diligent in his endeavours to be at all times simply the instrument of the God-King, and exercise his authority solely in the name and according to the will of Jehovah; and as the natural selfishness and pride of man easily made this concentration of the supreme earthly power in a single person an occasion for self-aggrandisement, and therefore the Israelitish kings were exposed to the temptation to use the plenary authority entrusted to them, even in opposition to the will of God, the Lord raised up for Himself organs of His own Spirit, in the persons of the prophets, to stand by the side of the kings and make known to them the will and counsel of God. . . . . Whilst the predictions of the anointed of the Lord before and in connection with the call of Samuel (1 Sam. ii. 27-36, iii. 11 sqq.), show the deep spiritual connection between the prophetic order and the regal office in Israel, the insertion of them in these books is a proof that from the very outset the author had this new organisation of the Israelitish kingdom of God before his mind, and that it was his intention not simply to hand down biographies of Samuel, Saul, and David, but to relate the history of the Old Testament Kingdom of God, at the time of its elevation out of a deep outward and inward decline into the full authority and power of a kingdom of the Lord, before which all its enemies were to be compelled to bow. Israel was to become a kingship of priests, *i.e.*, a kingdom whose citizens were priests and kings. The Lord had announced this to the sons of Israel before the covenant was concluded at Sinai, as the ultimate object of their adoption as the people of His possession (Exod. xix. 5, 6). Now, although this promise reached far beyond the times of the Old Covenant, and will only receive its perfect fulfilment in the completion of the kingdom of God under the New Covenant, yet it was to be realised even in the people of Israel so far as the economy of the Old Testament allowed. Israel was not only to become a priestly nation, but a royal nation also; not only to be sanctified as a congregation of the Lord, but also to be exalted into a kingdom of God. The establishment of the earthly monarchy, therefore, was not only an eventful turning point, but also an "epoch-making" advance in the development of Israel towards the goal set before it in its Divine calling. And this advance became the pledge of the ultimate attainment of the goal, through the promise which David received from God (2 Sam. vii. 12-16), that the Lord would establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. With this promise God established for His anointed the eternal covenant, to which David reverted at the close of his reign, and upon which he rested

his Divine announcement of the just ruler over men, the ruler in the fear of God (2 Sam. xxiii. 1-7). Thus the close of these books points back to their commencement. The prophecy of the pious mother of Samuel (1 Sam. ii. 10) found a fulfilment in the kingdom of David, which was at the same time a pledge of the ultimate completion of the kingdom of God under the sceptre of the Son of David, the promised Messiah. This is one, and in fact the most conspicuous, arrangement of the facts connected with the history of salvation, which determined the plan and composition of the work before us. By the side of this there is another, which does not stand out so prominently indeed, but yet must not be overlooked. At the very beginning, the inward decay of the house of God under the high priest Eli, is exhibited; and in the announcement of the judgment upon the house of Eli, a long-continued oppression of the dwelling place [of God] is foretold (chap. ii. 32). Then in the further course of the narrative it is shown how David first of all brought the ark of the covenant, about which no one had troubled himself in the time of Saul, out of its concealment, had a tent erected for it upon Mount Zion, and made it once more the central point of the worship of the congregation; and how, after that, when the Lord had given him rest from his enemies, he wished to build a temple to the Lord to be the dwelling-place of His name; and lastly, when God would not permit him to carry out this resolution, but promised that his son should build the house of the Lord, how, towards the close of his reign, he consecrated the site for the future temple by building an altar upon Mount Moriah (2 Sam. xxiv. 25). Even in this series of facts, the end of the work points back to the beginning, so that the arrangement and composition of it according to a definite plan are very apparent. If we take into account the deep-seated connection between the building of the temple as designed by David, and the confirmation of his monarchy on the part of God, as exhibited in 2 Sam. vii., we cannot fail to observe that the historical development of the true kingdom, in accordance with the nature and constitution of the Old Testament Kingdom of God, forms the leading thought and purpose of the work to which the name of Samuel has been attached, and that it was by this thought and aim that the writer was influenced throughout in his selection of the historical materials which lay before him in the sources which he employed." That our Lord and the Apostles recognised the Book of Samuel as forming a part of the canon of Holy Scripture is shown by the following references which are made to it in the New Testament:—

Matt. xii. 3, 4, etc., to 1 Sam. xxi. 1–6.
Acts iii. 24 to the general history.
Acts vii. 46 to 2 Sam. vii. 1, 2.
Acts xiii. 20–22 to 1 Sam. ix. 15.
Heb. i. 5 to 2 Sam. vii. 14.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Verse 1. The site of **Ramath-Zophim** is declared by Dean Stanley to be "the most disputed problem of sacred topography." It is universally allowed, and it is implied by Josephus to be the Ramah in which Samuel lived, died, and was buried; but next to nothing of its position can be gathered from the narrative. It is here said to be in Mount Ephraim, but the limits of that district are uncertain. The name Ramathaim—the *double eminence*—probably points to a city whose site was on two hills. But there were several cities of this name in the land of Israel, and all on more or less elevated sites. No certain explanation has ever been given of the addition *Zophim*. There was such a place on the east of Jordan (Num. xxiii. 14), and "the land of Zuph" is mentioned in chapter ix. 5. The region may have derived its name from Elkanah's ancestor. Some regard it as a common noun signifying "watch-towers" from the high position of the city. **Elkanah.** "The Levitical descent of Elkanah and Samuel is put beyond doubt by a comparison of the genealogy here with those in Chronicles (1 Chr. vi. 22 sq., and verse 33 sq.). Samuel is here shown to belong to the Kohathites. *Elkanah, i.e.*, he whom God acquired or purchased, is both in its signification and use a Levite name. All the Elkanahs mentioned in the Old Testament (leaving out the one in 2 Chron. xxviii. 7, whose tribe is not stated) were demonstrably Levites, and belonged mostly to the family of Korah, from whom Samuel was descended" (*Lange's Commentary*).

Ver. 2. **"Two wives."** "Perhaps he took the second on account of Hannah's barrenness" (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 3. **"Yearly."** Probably to the Passover, as that was the only feast which the whole family were accustomed to attend (Luke ii. 41). **"To worship and sacrifice."** "The beautiful picture of Israelitish piety which we have in the following account of Elkanah and Hannah is introduced by these features, as the chief and fundamental ones. The *worship* relates to the *name* of the Lord, who dwells in His chosen place in the sanctuary, and is the expression of the remembrance of this name before the Lord. The *sacrifice* is the embodied prayer. In the sacrifice worship is presented to the Lord as the act by which the offerer brings himself and all that he has to the Lord" (*Lange's Commentary*). If the Law given by God to Moses had been observed, Elkanah would (unless he was now more than fifty years of age, which seems unlikely) have been required to officiate in his turn in the service of the tabernacle. (See Numb. viii. 24-26). That he did not do so is only one evidence, among many, of the low state of religion at the time. **"Lord of Hosts,"** "Jehovah Zebaoth." "Here first used as a Divine name. It represents Jehovah as ruler of the heavenly hosts, *i.e.*, the angels (Gen. xxxii. 2) and the stars (Isa. xl. 26); it is simply applied to Jehovah as the God of the universe" (*Keil*). "This appellation occurs sixty-two times in Isaiah, sixty-five in Jeremiah, and not once in Job or Ezekiel" (*Wordsworth*). **"Shiloh."** *i.e.*, "Rest." The tabernacle was set up here in the days of Joshua (Josh. xviii. 1). Its position is described in Judges xxi. 19. This minute description has enabled modern travellers to identify it. "This quiet place, situated on a hill (Psa. lxxviii. 54), was the scene of the mighty revolution brought about in the history of the theocracy by the call of Samuel to be the prophet of God, and by the overthrow of the priestly house of Eli" (*Lange's Commentary*). **"And the two sons of Eli,"** etc. They performed the priestly functions for their father, on account of his great age.

Ver. 4. "When Elkanah offered." "That this sacrifice was a praise or thank-offering (Lev. vii. 15) is clear from what follows" (*Lange's Commentary*). **"Portions."** Of that part of the peace-offerings which belonged to them that offered. This was the whole, except the fat, which belonged to the Lord, and the breast and the right shoulder, which belonged to the priest. This feast was intended to be of a joyful character (Deut. xii. 12, xvi. 11).

Ver. 5. **"A worthy portion."** This phrase has been much disputed, but it seems most likely to mean a *double* portion. This was an Oriental mode of expressing favour. See Gen. xliii. 34. **"The Lord had shut up her womb."** Childlessness was not only held to be a misfortune, but a Divine punishment (Gen. xix. 31; xxx. 1, 23).

Ver. 6. **"Her adversary."** *i.e.*, Peninnah.

Ver. 7. **"He did so year by year,"** *i.e.*, every year Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion.

Ver. 9. **"Post,"** or portal. "Probably a porch which had been placed before the curtain that formed the entrance into the Holy Place" (*Keil*). **"Temple,"** "or *palace*, so called not on account of the magnificence of the building, but as the dwelling place of the God-king of Israel as in Psalm v. 8" (*Keil*). "I think this is the first place where the *temple* of Jehovah is mentioned. This confirms the opinion that the book was compiled after the building of the Temple" (*A. Clarke*).

Ver. 11. "Sterile women in the East to this day perform pilgrimages to holy places, and often make a vow that, in case they should be blessed with a son, he shall become a monk (*Fausset*). **"Vowed a Vow."** This vow contained two distinct points—(1) That she would dedicate her son to the Lord in a life-long service, while as a Levite he was only bound from the age of 20 to 50 (Num. viii., 24, 25), and (2) that "no razor should come upon his head," by which he was set apart as a Nazarite for the whole of his life. "There is no notice in the Pentateuch of a Nazarite for life; but the regulations for the vow of a Nazarite of days are given in Num. vi. 1-21. . . . . Of the Nazarites for life three are mentioned in the Scriptures: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. The only one actually called a Nazarite is Samson. The Rabbis raised the question whether Samuel was in reality a Nazarite. It is expressly stated that no razor shall come upon his head; but no mention is made of abstinence from wine. It is, however, worthy of notice that Philo makes a particular point of this, and seems to refer the words of Hannah, in verse 15, to Samuel himself. We do not know whether the vow for life was ever voluntarily taken by the individual. In all the cases mentioned in sacred history, it was made by the parents before the birth of the Nazarite himself. According to the general law of vows (Num. xxx. 8), the mother could not take the vow without the father. Hannah must therefore either have presumed on her husband's concurrence, or secured it beforehand. The Nazarite of days might have fulfilled his vow without attracting much notice until the day came for him to make his offering in the temple. But the Nazarite for life, on the other hand, with his flowing hair and persistent refusal of strong drink, must have been a marked man. Whether in any other particular his daily life was peculiar is uncertain. He may have had some privileges which gave him something of a priestly character—there is an ancient tradition that Nazarites were permitted even to enter into the Holy of Holies. Perhaps it would not be unreasonable to suppose that the half-sacerdotal character of Samuel might have been connected with his prerogative as a Nazarite. Though not necessarily cut off from social life, when the turn of his mind was devotional, consciousness of his peculiar dedication must have influenced his habits and manner, and in some cases probably led him to retire from the world. And as the vow of the Nazarite was taken by his parents before he was conscious of it, his observance of it was a sign of filial obedience, like the vow of the Rechabites. . . . The meaning of the Nazarite vow has been regarded in different lights. Some deny that it involved anything of an ascetic character; others imagine that it was intended to cultivate, and bear witness for, the sovereignty of the will over the lower tendencies of human nature; while some regard it wholly in the light of a sacrifice of the person to God. . . . . That the Nazarite vow was essentially a sacrifice of the person is obviously in accordance with the terms of the Law (Num. vi. 2). In the old dispensation it may have answered to that "living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which the believer is now called upon to make." (*Smith's Bible Dictionary.*) That part of the vow of the Nazarite which had to do with his spiritual nature was the abstinence from strong drink. The other observances were merely ceremonial, and related only to the outward man. But strong drink can and often does influence the mind, and may be the means of moral deterioration. Even when not indulged in to excess, it may be used to such an extent as to dull the spiritual sense, and to unfit men for holding intimate communion with God. It was not a mere arbitrary statute when "*The Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine or strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die*" (Num. x. 8-9).

Ver. 13. "She spake in her heart." Prayer is almost always oral in the East, even in public (*Kitto*).

Ver. 14. "Put away thy wine from thee," *i.e.*, sleep off the effects of intoxication.

Ver. 15. "Neither wine nor strong drink has been *poured out* unto me, but I have *poured out* my soul before the Lord" (*A. Clarke*).

Ver. 16. "Belial," *i.e.*, worthlessness or wickedness. The word is not a proper name, although it has become impersonified to indicate the "wicked one." "*Complaint,*" "meditation, inward movement of the heart, sighing" (*Keil*).

Ver. 17. This word of the High Priest was not a prediction, but a pious wish (*Keil*).

Ver. 20. "Samuel." "From *Shama* to hear, and *El*, God (*Wordsworth*). "The words of Hannah are not an etymological explanation of the name, but an exposition founded upon the facts" (*Keil*).

Ver. 21. "Yearly Sacrifice" literally, the "offering of the days,"—the Israelites' customary and obligatory annual sacrifice. The "offering of the days" is, as it were, the yearly reckoning with the Lord, the presentation of those portions of the property which fall to him in the course of the year" (*Hengstenberg*). **"His Vow."** Here is a proof that Elkanah had likewise vowed unto the Lord in reference to Samuel.

Ver. 23. "Only the Lord establish His word." "Elkanah seeks from God, and suppliantly

begs with prayers, that, since God has bestowed on him male offspring, He will consecrate him and make him fit for His service (*Calvin*).

Ver. 24. Hebrew mothers were accustomed to suckle their children for three years (2 Macc. vii. 27). "A child three years old is not troublesome in the East, and his nurture and education could be committed to the women that served at the door of the Tabernacle. By the education which the boy received in the Sanctuary he was even as a child to grow into the service; and moreover, as a child, he could perform little outward services" (*Lange's Commentary*). **"Three bullocks."** Two would be required for the customary yearly offering, viz., one for the burnt-offering and the other for the thank-offering, the third was probably a special offering in connection with Samuel's consecration, and on this account, the only one whose slaying is mentioned in verse 25. **"The child was young,"** literally, "the child was a child," *i.e.*, **not** merely in tenderness of years, but in docility, meekness, and gentleness" (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 28. Lent. "The meaning to lend, which the lexicons give to the word both here and in Exod. xii. 36, has no other support than the false rendering of the Septuagint, and is altogether unsuitable both in the one and in the other. Jehovah had not *lent* the son to Hannah, but had *given* him; still less could a man *lend* his son to the Lord" (*Keil*). **"He" refers to Elkanah, and not to Samuel** (*Keil*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 1.

The Value and Use of a Genealogy.

I. The man who possesses a genealogy knows who and what he represents in the world. Every human creature, in fact everything in the world that possesses life, represents more than he or it is. A single corn-seed represents all the grains by which it has come into existence—all the seeds which have lived and germinated and brought forth fruit between itself and the original grain from which it sprung in the beginning. Every man knows that he represents numerically more than he is, and very possibly more intellectual power or moral greatness than belongs to him as an individual, but only he who possesses a genealogy knows certainly who and what he represents. The written pedigree of his ancestors makes him realise his oneness with the ages that are past, and he will feel ennobled or dishonoured by the record according as the lives of his forefathers accord with, or are opposed to, what he considers worth representing. Elkanah knew that he represented a line of ancestors in one of the most remarkable tribes in the Jewish nation—a tribe which had numbered among its members men of great mental power and high moral wealth. Although personally he was inferior to some of these great men, he felt in some degree that he belonged to them—that he represented their worth and greatness. A tree growing in this country may have sprung from the seed of a tropical tree. It may attain to sufficient size and beauty to be a worthy representative of its tropical ancestors, but the difference of climate, as well as some inherent weakness in the tree itself, may prevent it from reaching their gigantic stature—from branching forth into their vast proportions. So it may be with many a man who represents an old and worthily renowned family; circumstances, as well as mental inferiority may prevent them from attaining the renown of their ancestors, although they may be good and true men and worthily fill a small space in the world. Such men represent more than they are—not only in *numbers*, but in *ability* and *renown*. Elkanah was such a representative man. Being able as he was to trace his ancestry, he knew that he belonged to the tribe whence came the most remarkable man of the ancient world—one who has left an impress upon the nations which will last as long as time. Elkanah, by the possession of a genealogy, knew that he had the honour of numbering Moses among his ancestors, and although he knew he could never attain to the renown of his great forefather, he must have felt there was honour in belonging to the same tribe as the Jewish lawgiver. He knew that he belonged to a stock

who on one memorable occasion had given proof that they preferred moral right to blood relationship—who had declared themselves on the Lord's side in the day of Israel's first idolatry—"who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither acknowledged his brethren, nor knew his own children" (Deut. xxxiii. 9), in other words, preferred the honour of Jehovah's name to all human claims (Exod. xxxii. 26-28).

II. The value of such a possession, and the teaching it might suggest. 1. *The knowledge that those to whom we are related by ties of blood-relationship have been great and noble—have done deeds and spoken words which reflect a lustre upon their descendants long after they have left the world—ought to inspire those descendants with resolution to tread in their footsteps.* Although the times in which they live may not demand the same sacrifices—may not admit of the same renown—yet the principles which govern the lives of the truly great and good are the same in all ages, and under all conditions of life. Although Elkanah could not be a Moses, he could emulate his moral excellence; although he was not called to make such a remarkable demonstration of his fidelity to Jehovah as his fathers had made in the wilderness, he could always act upon the principle of preferring duty to God before any human tie or any mere earthly consideration. 2. *The knowledge that we belong to the great and good is also a source of lawful comfort and satisfaction, if we ourselves have enough godliness not to disgrace our ancestry.* To feel that we are the children of those who have served their generation according to the will of God, and have perhaps been called by Him to some great and special service, cannot fail to afford lawful satisfaction to any man. Doubtless Elkanah, in his humbler and more limited sphere, felt a special gratification that he was linked in tribal relationship with him "whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. xxxiv. 10), and that he was one of that chosen tribe who were elected by God to be the teachers of Israel and the "body-guard of the sacred structure which was the sign of the presence among the people of their unseen King"—Num. i. 51, xviii. 22. (See on Levi "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible.") 3. *A genealogy teaches a man his own mortality and immortality, and the mortality and immortality of his fathers.* Every family register proclaims the mortality and the immortality of man. It tells of the body whose dust is still with us, and of the spirit that is "absent from the body." The life once lived upon the earth made a genealogy possible—linked the individual with the long line of progenitors who had gone before him and with all those who have come and will come after him. This life could not have been lived without the body which was mortal and has returned to the earth, yet that body would never have been more than lifeless clay if it had not been animated by a "living soul," who was, and is still, the *man himself*—still living and feeling and acting in another part of God's universe. To the Old Testament saints a genealogy spoke of those who were "gathered to their fathers" (Gen. xl. 29, etc.); to us it tells of "just men made perfect" in the city of the living God (Heb. xii. 23), who died as to bodily life, but who live still as to spiritual life. It teaches also the *earthly* immortality of the *race.* The man passes away—the race remains. *He* leaves the world, but *his* are left in it. Abraham was long ago called away, but his descendants are with us to this day. Levi had quitted the world long before the days of Elkanah, but he lived still in Canaan in his representatives.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 2—8.

A Troubled Household.

I. A violation of the Divine intention in the institution of marriage. Elkanah had two wives. God, by creating one wife only as the helpmeet for the first man, declared against polygamy and bigamy. Our Lord, in expounding to the Pharisees the law of divorce, speaks decidedly upon the subject. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his *wife*, and they *twain* shall be one flesh" (Matt. xix. 5). Apostolic teaching reiterates the law. "Let every man have his own *wife*, and every woman her own *husband*" (1 Cor. vii. 2). "Let every one of you in particular so love his *wife*, even as himself" (Ephes. v. i.). The violation of the Divine intention in this institution originated in a bad man. Lamech is the first person of whom it is recorded that he "took unto him two wives" (Gen. iv. 19), and his own words tell us that he was a man of blood. A descendant of the first murderer, he trod in the same murderous path. His example was not followed by those sons of Seth, who were honoured to re-found the human race. Noah and his three sons entered into the ark, each having his one wife (Gen. vii. 13), but the sin of Lamech became more and more common until it grew into a custom, and many better men than he thus profaned God's holy ordinance. Abraham, Jacob, and Elkanah were good men, yet they all in this respect followed in the forbidden path first trodden by a man-slayer. A miner working in darkness unconsciously becomes blackened by the dusty atmosphere in which he is working. Imperceptibly to himself, one sooty particle after another settles upon his body and his raiment, until he becomes entirely assimilated in colour to the blackness and dirt all around him. The custom of society unconsciously colours men's characters and habits. Their very conscience is influenced by the moral atmosphere which they breathe—they become coloured by the thoughts and actions of those by whom they are surrounded, and often yield their consent to a wicked custom, the sin of which they do not perceive because of the moral darkness in which they live. It was doubtless so with those of the patriarchs who practised bigamy or polygamy, and it was so also with Elkanah.

II. This violation of Divine intention becoming a means of chastisement. The custom of polygamy was doubtless very common in the Hebrew nation, and paved the way to much gross iniquity, and led them to the adoption of many other corrupt practices of the heathen nations, for which, as a nation, they suffered severe chastisement. Here we have an instance of chastisement in the case of an individual and upright man. Although he had committed no exceptional sin—although he had only followed other good men in conforming to a very common custom—he could not escape the inevitable retribution which must always follow breaking any fence which God has placed about man's path. Doubtless Hannah would have been sorrowful at the absence of children if she had been Elkanah's only wife, but it would not have been aggravated by the insolence of Peninnah. Custom had quarried these two upper and nether millstones, and between them Elkanah's domestic bliss must have been ground to powder, for the strife was so bitter that it entered even into the service of the house of God. (See verse 7.) The history of the world confirms the teaching of this history of a single family. The nations who adhere to God's original intention in the marriage state are spared from many sorrows, and avoid many crimes which must always be the fruit of such a morally unhealthy and unnatural custom. The joys of the home life are unknown where polygamy is practised—a terrible penalty is paid by all those nations who thus violate God's holy and blessed institution.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. Elkanah was one of the sons of Korah. Of that gainsaying "sinner against his own soul" came Samuel. *Homo ille virtute simillimus.—Trapp.*

Ver. 2. Polygamy might now plead age and example. Ill customs are like fashions of attire, which at the first are disliked as uncomely, yet, when once they are grown common, are taken up of the gravest. Yet this sin, as then current with the time, could not make Elkanah not religious; the house of God in Shiloh was duly frequented by him, and once a year with all his family. The continuance of an unknown sin cannot hinder the uprightness of a man's heart with God; as a man may have a mole on his back, and yet think his skin clear; the least touch of wilfulness mars his sincerity.—*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 3. Elkanah's piety in maintaining a regular attendance on the Divine ordinances is the more worthy of notice, that the character of the two priests who administered them was notoriously bad. But doubtless he believed and acted on the belief that the ordinances were effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in those who administered them, but from the grace of God being communicated through them.—*Fausset.*

This title, "The Lord of Hosts" (see Critical Notes), seems to be inserted designedly by the sacred historian at the beginning of this book, which relates the craving of Israel for an earthly king, when the Lord was their King, and the setting up of an earthly kingdom in Saul. It is like a preliminary protest against that act of national faithlessness.—*Wordsworth.*

The offering was the deed which established the faithlessness of the praying word.—*Starke.*

This subject-matter of adoration is to be referred to the three following heads: *Firstly*, that when about to adore God we recognise that we owe all things to Him, and in giving thanks for past blessings we implore a still further increase of His gifts; *secondly*, that confessing our sins as suppliant and guilty, we pray Him to grant us true knowledge of our sins and repentance, and to pardon us; *thirdly*, and finally, that denying ourselves and taking His yoke upon our shoulders, we profess ourselves ready to render Him true obedience, and to conform our affections to the rule of His law and His will alone.—*Calvin.*

Ver. 4. The whole family take part in the feast of the peace-offerings. So as to the idol-worship in Jer. vii. 18. Both this passage and that, as to true religion and false, may impress upon us the importance of family worship and family religion.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 5. "The Lord had shut up her womb." This is the language of piety, which refers all to God, and knows only one source of blessings; we only have that which He gives, and we cannot have that which he refuses to us.—*Duguet.*

Peninnah may have the more children, but barren Hannah hath the most love. If Hannah should have had both, she had been proud, and her rival despised. God knows how to disperse His favours so that everyone may have cause both for thankfulness and humiliation; whilst there is no one that hath all, no one but hath some—*Bishop Hall.*

Children were then regarded as a blessing, and the correctness of this view is confirmed by the inspired writers, Psa. cxiii. 9; cxxvii. 3-5; cxxviii. 3. The contrary feeling, which is now so rapidly growing in America, is evil, both in its *causes* and in its *consequences.—American Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 7. Peninnah is an example of those who think themselves to be saints because they participate in holy things and partake of Divine blessings, but Hannah is a model of true peni-

tents, seeking not to justify herself since the Lord seemed to condemn her. She judged herself unworthy to partake of the sacred feast since she deemed herself under the displeasure of God.—*Duguet.*

Ver. 8. In a devout marriage, the love of the one party should not only be to the other a fountain of consolation and of quieting as to painful dispensations of the Lord, but for whatever by the Lord's will is lacking in good fortune and joy it should seek to offer all the richer compensation.—*Lange's Commentary.*

In Elkanah we have an example of a most excellent husband, who patiently tolerated the insolent humour of Peninnah, and comforted dejected Hannah with words full of tender affection, which was truly, in St. Peter's words, *to dwell with his wives according to knowledge.—Patrick.*

As the marriage bond is much closer than that between parents and children, it follows that husband and wife must hold each other nearer and dearer than all children.—*J. Lange.*

Verses 1-8. *The priestly calling of the man in his house.* 1. In the close connection of his whole house with the service in the house of the Lord (prayer and offering). 2. In the nurture and admonition of the children for the Lord (see comment on verse 4). 3. In expelling and keeping at a distance the evil spirit of unlovingness and dissension in the members of a family. 4. In the constant exhibition of faithful, comforting, helping love towards his wife. *The preservation of genuine piety amid domestic troubles.* 1. In persevering prayer, when the Lord proves faith by not fulfilling particular desires and hopes. 2. In enduring patience towards vexatious members of the family. 3. In consoling and supporting love towards those members who are easily assailed. *Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9-11.

THE PRAYER OF HANNAH.

In this prayer we have—

I. A recognition of God's faithful performance of His promises. When a parent promises to meet his child in a certain place at a certain time, and the child is found waiting at the appointed place at the given time, the act is a declaration of faith in the parent's faithfulness. The child's position and attitude denote a recognition of the truthfulness of the parent's word. God had promised to "meet the children of Israel" in an especial manner in the tabernacle (Exod. xxix. 43) "*in the place which He should choose to place His name there*" (Deut. xvi. 11). Hannah's choice of the house of God as the place whence she would direct her prayer—whence she would look up for help in her sorrow—is a declaration that she believed the Divine Word. Her presence there declares that she believed in another Presence there—even of Him who was known to Israel of old to "dwell between the cherubims" (Exod. xxv. 22; 1 Sam. iv. 4).

II. A recognition of God's knowledge of the secrets of the human soul. "She spake in her heart, only her lips moved" (verse 13). Speech of some kind is necessary if one human being would communicate with another, and there are some thoughts and feelings which, not being capable of being put into words, must remain for ever uncommunicated to any earthly friend. In this sense the heart is compelled sometimes to "know its own bitterness," and "no stranger" (no one outside the spirit) can "intermeddle therewith" (Prov. xiv. 10). The human body is the means by which the human soul reveals itself, and yet it

conceals often more than it reveals. So word is the body of thought—the great means of making thought known among men—yet it often hides more than it makes known. But "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit" (Rom. viii. 27). He stands face to face with the inmost feelings—the deepest emotions—of every human soul. He needs not the information conveyed by words—He sees not through them as "through a glass, darkly," but without that veil between reads the aspirations of the burdened heart—hears the "groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. viii. 26). Hannah recognises this truth when, without words, she speaks to the Eternal God. By her silent prayer she shows she was penetrated with that sense of the Divine Omniscience which filled David's mind when he wrote "*O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me, Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off*" (Psalm cxxxix. 1, 2).

III. A recognition of obligation to God before the petition is granted. "Thine handmaid." Hannah was God's handmaid whether the blessing she craved was granted or withheld. A servant (while he acknowledges the relation) is bound to obey his master's commands—to acquiesce in his will, whether that will always coincides with his own or not. While the relationship is acknowledged the obligation continues. Hannah, by her own acknowledgment, was a servant of the God of Israel. She was under an obligation to serve Him, whether He fulfilled her heart's desire or not. She recognises the fact that she was already God's debtor—bound to obey His commands and acquiesce in His will, whatever might be the issue of her prayer. She admits that her obligation will be increased if God grants the desire of her heart: "If Thou wilt look upon Thine handmaid," etc.; but she does not make her obligation to God depend upon her prayer being answered.

IV. A recognition of God's care for the individual. That system of government and that code of laws are most perfect which take cognisance, not only of a nation as a whole, but of the special need of the individual—when it meets the need, not of men in a mass merely, but of each man. This can be done but imperfectly in human systems. Laws which are generally beneficial press hard in particular cases, or overlook particular exigencies. But it is not so in the Divine administration. His laws take hold of the individual man, and His providence works for each one, without injury to any. Each blade of grass drinks in the sunlight and is watered by the showers, as abundantly and as sufficiently as though it was alone upon the earth, instead of being a unit amid countless millions. And so each soul is as much the object of God's care as though He had no other creature to care for. "*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered*" (Matt. x. 29, 30). Hannah's prayer—a personal statement of her own personal sorrows and desires—shows that she recognised the fact that the God of Israel not only "knew the sorrows" of the nation as a whole, and was "willing to come down to deliver them" (Exod. iii. 8), but that He had regard to the heart-grief of a single sorrowful woman among the thousands of Israel.

V. A very specific statement of her desire. "If Thou wilt give unto Thy handmaid a man-child." All successful pleading is specific. If it begins with generalities it does not end with them. When a barrister pleads for his client he does not content himself with general appeals—he puts definitely before the jury and the judge what he wants them to do. The widow made a definite statement of her want to the unjust judge—she told him exactly what she wanted him to do—"Avenge me of mine adversary" (Luke xviii. 3). It has been said that "Generalities are the death of prayer." Hannah's prayer was

most definite—she not only asks for a child—but for a *son*—and not only for a son but for one who would be in a special manner a servant of Jehovah.

VI. A recognition of the Divine working in and above natural laws. Hannah acknowledges God as the only Giver of natural life. The laws of nature, either in vegetable or animal life, are not the causes of that life, but the means by which the Creator pleases to give it. They are not the gods to whom the praise is due, but the servants of the one God who works in them and by them. Hannah's prayer recognises the truth that life can only come into being by the fiat of the Eternal. She asks for a living child from the only Life-Giver of the universe—from Him who alone "hath life in Himself" (John v. 26).

VII. A dedication of the desired blessing to the service of the Giver. "If Thou wilt give unto Thine handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life." The precious gift should be returned to the Giver. God's gift to her should be her gift to God. "The way to obtain any benefit," says Bishop Hall, "is to devote it, in our hearts, to the glory of that God of whom we ask it: by this means shall God both pleasure His servant and honour Himself; whereas, if the scope of our desires be carnal, we may be sure either to fail of our suit, or of a blessing."

In all the points we have noticed—in its faith in the Divine Word—in its recognition of Divine Omniscience—in its acknowledgment of the Divine claim to service—in its confidence in the Divine care for the individual—in its definiteness—in its discernment of a Divine power in all the laws of nature—and in its purpose to devote to the service of God the boon craved for at His hands—this prayer of the Hebrew matron may serve as a model for all prayers in all circumstances and in all ages. It is especially worthy of the study of those who are pleading with God, not for the gift of children—but for the spiritual life of children already given—of mothers whose daily and fervent prayer is put up to God that those whom He has given to them may be, in a spiritual sense, "sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 10. "If a woman has prayed with so much importunity," says St. Gregory, "to obtain a son from God, how ought we to pray to be made His children."—*De Sacy.*

The "hand of God in history" might be the appropriate title of many of the books of Scripture, for the sacred records largely illustrate the agency of God in the affairs of men. . . . That simple Hannah on her knees, with her face toward the tabernacle and the mercy seat, and her lips trembling with her prayer, became the link of a chain in the revival of piety and patriotism in the promised land. Her day of small things was to be succeeded by a life which would shed its blessings upon the chosen people, and illuminate a chapter of Hebrew history.—*Steele.*

Herein she took a right course to get comfort. So did David (Psalm cix. 4) and Paul (1 Cor. iv. 13), "Being defamed we pray." If she should have rendered to Peninnah railing for railing, there would have been somewhat to do. Prayer and patience are the best antidotes against contumelies and contempt; the one hot, the other cold; the one quickening, the other quenching. Prayers and tears are the saints' best weapons; their "great guns and their scaling ladders," saith Luther. —*Trapp.*

Amid vexations and assaults, what should impel us to prayer? 1. The certainty that if men do us hurt, it does not occur without the Divine permission. 2. The feeling that even the best human consolation cannot satisfy the heart which is thirsting to be consoled. 3. Firm confidence in the help

of the Lord, who in His faithfulness *will* help and in His power *can* help, when men will not help or cannot.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 11. She thrice calls herself the Lord's handmaid, out of a profound sense of her meanness and His majesty, and desires a man-child because only such could wait upon the Lord in the service of the tabernacle.—*Patrick.*

It may be asked whether Hannah or whether any parents have the right thus to consecrate their children, and so, without their consent, to interfere with their personal liberty? I answer, here was no vow of perpetual celibacy or of religious poverty. He had the liberty of marriage, for the Scripture speaks of his sons, and he preserved the possession and use of all his property. The engagement into which Hannah entered on behalf of Samuel simply consisted in his being attached to the tabernacle service for some years longer than an ordinary Levite, which was an honour, and in being brought up in the centre of religious influences. It was a precaution against the moral contagion of the times, and tended to promote a natural growth of piety in him—to make the love of God within him grow and strengthen with his years. It is true Hannah destined her son for a Nazarite, but this was only under the condition that God made him willing to accept the vow. She knew that He who inspired her to vow would inspire her child—if he were granted—with a willingness to perform his part of it; that, if God granted her the son, he would perfect his gift in inspiring him with a desire to be devoted to His service. . . . The human spirit, as it is since the fall, would never have established the custom of *vows*. Such an engaging of Providence would have appeared unworthy of the Supreme Majesty. The institution could only have come through a revelation. The universal usage, diffused among all nations, proves that the tradition descended from the family of Noah. God has condescended by this *religious commerce*, to bind us to Himself more firmly by means of our wants and our desires. He desires to impress upon our minds the truth that He rules in the least events of our lives, and, by this kind of contract that He makes with us in vows, He would awaken our faith by accepting the conditions that we offer, and in accomplishing that which we expect of Him.—*Le Maistre de Sacy.*

A vow is to be made with prayer, and paid with thanksgiving.—*Trapp.*

She has received nothing as yet, and she begins her prayer with a promise. She testifies already her gratitude to God, while her hands are still empty. . . . "I have two pleas," it is as if she had said, "I am Thy servant, and I am in trouble." "And my child shall be entirely and absolutely Thy servant. I give up all my maternal rights. I desire to be his mother only so far as that he shall owe his existence to me, after that I give him up to Thee." She does not say, "If Thou wilt give me three sons, I will give Thee two, if Thou wilt give me two, I will give Thee one," but "If Thou wilt give me one only, I will consecrate him entirely to Thee." . . . She does not name her rival in her prayer, she utters no invectives, she complains of no injury, and speaks only concerning the matters which fill her soul. . . . If we are wise, not only will our enemies be unable to do us the least harm, but they will be the occasion of our greatest good, if prayer is our resource from the vexations that they cause us.—*Chrysostom.*

The local service promised by the mother was afterwards interrupted, chiefly by the call of Samuel to higher duties as prophet. To the mother the sanctuary-service seemed the best pursuit of life; but God had something better for the son. Yet Hannah's devout spiritual *purpose* is maintained in her son's life.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 12—18.

HANNAH AND ELI.

I. The wrong interpretation which Eli put upon Hannah's conduct shows— 1. *That the occurrence was an uncommon one.* It was not a common thing in those degenerate days for Eli to see a devout and deeply-moved worshipper in the house of God. His eyes were not accustomed to the sight of a soul so absorbed in wrestling with God, and so filled with a sense of the Divine presence as to be oblivious of all external things. He was used probably to hear the audible, formal prayers of less spiritual worshippers, but the silent communion of the soul with its God was apparently beyond his power of spiritual apprehension. His explanation of the unwonted spectacle suggests the thought that Eli himself was not accustomed to very close communion with God—that he was not in the habit of coming into the presence of Jehovah with a heart full of emotions too deep for utterance. Be that as it may, it has never been uncommon for those who are ignorant of the deeper experiences of spiritual life—whether of a joyful or sorrowful nature—to refer them to a wrong source. The fervour of the Christian Church on the day of Pentecost was referred to the influence of "new wine" (Acts ii. 13). In the days of martyrdom those who faced death with joyful courage, being filled with the power of the Spirit of God, were sometimes charged by their enemies, or by those who had never drunk at the same fountain of Divine comfort, with being in league with the devil and with being supported by him. Uncommon spiritual phenomena, like any uncommon phenomenon in the natural world, are always liable to be wrongly interpreted and to be attributed to a wrong source by those who are utterly ignorant in such matters. Festus could only account for Paul's enthusiasm concerning Jesus of Nazareth by—"*Paul, thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad*" (Acts xxvi. 24). The uncommon phenomenon of such a prisoner at his bar could be referred by him to nothing else. The harsh judgment passed by Eli upon Hannah—his entire misapprehension of her character and conduct—is a type of what has happened ten thousand times in the past, is happening now, and will go on to happen while men are imperfect. And it is to be especially noted that not only does the world thus misunderstand the actions of the saints of God, but one good man or woman often, through ignorance, thus misjudges another—often refers an act which lies outside his or her own range of experience to a motive or to a cause which is the very opposite of the real one. 2. *That the kind of worshipper Eli supposed Hannah to be was not uncommon in the Tabernacle.* Everybody who has had any experience in the professing Church of God, knows that indulgence in strong drink and attendance upon the services of God's house are not incompatible. Men who are lovers of wine are sometimes also very fervent and devout in external service, and will even utter prayers while under the partial influence of intoxicating drink. There is abundant evidence in the Old Testament writings that drunkenness was one of the sins of the ancient people of God. It was inseparable from such a state of things as that described in chapter ii. 22. Doubtless many "daughters of Belial" and daughters of Bacchus frequented the house of God in Shiloh, and Eli had often good reason to say to a devout drunkard, "*How long will thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee.*" 3. *How suspicion blunts the power of discrimination.* If a man has reason to think he has been deceived in the past by certain characters or by certain aspects of character, he will find himself always prone to suspect any person or appearance of the same kind that is presented to him. And this suspicion will make him less impartial—more uncharitable—in his judgment than he otherwise would be. It is one of the saddest influences of crime upon good men

that it sometimes makes them harsh and unjust to innocent people. Eli had seen so many hypocritical and vicious worshippers in the tabernacle that he could not discern a really devout one when she came—he hastily leaped to the conclusion that this godly woman was like most of those who frequented the service of God.

II. Hannah's reception of the unmerited accusation. Consider how keenly she must have felt Eli's words. Constantly insulted and taunted as she was, by her rival at home, she would naturally look for sympathy from the priest of God—to receive from him an insult greater even than she could have ever received from Peninnah, must have been like a sword-thrust to one already deeply wounded. Her defence is at once—1. *Emphatic.* She meets the accusation with a decided *No.* It is the duty of all, when wrongly accused, to meet such an accusation with an emphatic denial. We owe it to ourselves to declare that we are innocent. 2. *Calm and respectful.* "No, my lord." "Count not thine handmaid a daughter of Belial." Nothing is more likely than an unjust accusation to arouse angry feeling. We are, then, in imminent danger of forgetting not only what we owe to the person who accuses us, but what we owe to ourselves, and to let our indignation override our self-command. Hannah's calm reply shows that she was a woman who knew how to rule her own spirit, that she had profited by the home discipline to which she had been subjected. There were many things connected with Eli's family which, if she had been disposed to retaliate, she might have used to inflict a wound upon her accuser. But she was too high-minded a woman to descend to the use of such weapons. Spirited as was her reply, there was no lack of respect to God's High Priest. 3. *Explanatory.* We may often be conscious, when wrongfully accused, that information only is needed to convince our accuser that he is in the wrong. It is our duty not to withhold this. Circumstances which admit of a very easy explanation may look sometimes very much against us. It was so in Hannah's case. A bottle that is full will pour out its contents much more slowly than one which contains but little. So with the heart full of sorrow. Its feelings are long in finding an outlet—it is long before there is any feeling of relief in prayer. Hannah had continued long before the Lord in silent prayer, and this, doubtless, gave some colour to Eli's suspicion. She was not too angry, or too proud, to give him a full explanation of all that had occurred.

III. Eli's benediction. It involves the admission that he had erred. A block of ice and a block of marble may look equally hard and feel equally cold; but if the warm sun shine on them, how soon will the difference be seen. The one will remain as hard and cold as ever, the other will be melted into streams of refreshing water. So with a good and a bad man. Both may speak harsh words in haste, both are liable to err in judgment, but the one can be melted into contrition for the wrong he has done and will acknowledge his fault, while the other remains proud and unsubdued. Eli's change of speech and of bearing towards the woman whom he had wronged, showed his desire to atone for his error, and gave evidence that he "rejoiced not in iniquity, but rejoiced in the truth" (1 Cor. xiii. 6); that it gave him no pleasure to utter stern rebuke, but that it gladdened his heart to be able to say, "*Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him.*" Thus we have seen:

I. *The best people and the purest actions may be misconstrued even by good men.*

II. *The most vicious men may be found observing the external forms of religion.*

III. *That care is needed lest much experience of the wickedness of the wicked harden us against the good.*

IV. *That a false accusation should not overthrow our self-command.*

V. *That a good man will not be too proud to confess himself in the wrong.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 12, 13. A devout prayer must proceed from the very bottom of the heart, and may be offered without outward words (Ps. xix. 14, xxvii. 8, lxxii. 8; Isa. xxix. 13, 14).—*Starke.*

Her voice was not heard by man, but God heard it.—*Chrysostom.*

She continued praying, as resolved not to give over her suit. Prayer, like those arrows of deliverance, should be multiplied. We wring out of God's holy hands that mercy which He with an unwilling willingness withholdeth for awhile, that we may be the more importunate.—*Trapp.*

Hannah had learned from Moses thus to pray, for when he fell upon his face before God, without uttering a sound, God grants his request, and says, "Why criest thou unto me?" (Exod. xiv. 15).—*Le Maistre de Sacy.*

The fervent prayer of troubled souls measures itself not by time, but exalts the soul above time into eternity, and troubles itself not about human observation and judgment, but is a pouring out of the heart before the living God. —*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 16. Here we see what account this holy woman made of drunken persons and of drunkenness; she counteth them the sons and daughters of Belial. And, indeed, unto them fitly agree all the significations of this word:—(1) They are licentious and lawless, without any yoke or bridle to keep them in; (2) they are altogether unprofitable, they neither do good to others nor to themselves; (3) and such do neither prosper in this world, and without repentance do exclude themselves from the celestial inheritance.—*Willet.*

She calls herself Eli's handmaid, and strives to remove his bad opinion of her. She does not say, "He has wantonly and thoughtlessly accused me; his suspicion is most ill-timed; my conscience is clear, I will let who will calumniate me." But she conforms to that law of the Apostle who commands us "to appear honest in the sight of men"—*Chrysostom.*

Defence against unjust accusations. 1. For what *purpose?* As a tribute to truth, for the honour of the Lord, as a tribute to our own moral worth. 2. In what *manner?* In quietness and gentleness, without sinful passion, in humility and modesty. 3. By God's help, with what *result?* Convincing the accusers of their wrong, changing their bad words into blessings, lightening our own hearts of a heavy load.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 17. Hannah turns her accuser into her advocate by her wisdom and discretion.—*Chrysostom.*

Ver. 18. She that began her prayers with fasting and heaviness rises up from them with cheerfulness and repast. The conscience may well rest when it tells us that we have neglected no means of redressing our affliction; for then it may resolve to look either for amendment or patience.—*Bishop Hall.*

The life of faith can take comfort from a word, and rest a world upon a promise. Hannah's affairs *without* the sanctuary actually remained in the same state as before; but a transaction had taken place *within* it, which placed them in a new point of view. The favourable aspect of God gives a new aspect to everything besides.—*Cecil.*

I. It is a fact of history that prayer is answered. The history of the Church of God is a part of the history of the world—it is as much a part of it as the history of the empire of Rome, or the republics of Greece—and its existence and growth in the world is inseparably connected with the fact that God hears and answers prayer. The blessings that have descended upon her members in answer to their supplications are matters of historical fact. So with the history of the Hebrew nation. It is an incontestible fact that their history, as given in the Scriptures, is true, and this being admitted, it cannot be denied that the

cases of special Divine interposition in answer to prayer are true also. Their wilderness history has many instances of forgiveness and help being accorded to the earnest supplications of Moses on their behalf, and their entire early history is interwoven with records of prayers offered and prayers answered. The life of the prophet Samuel is an important part of Hebrew history—he was destined to take a foremost place among its heroes—and his very name is a record that God gives ear to the supplications of his children, and often grants to them the very gift they ask for. **II. The immediate effect of prayer upon the human spirit.** "The woman went her way, ... and her countenance was no more sad." Hannah's sorrow vanished from the hour in which she poured out her soul before the Lord in Shiloh. A consciousness arose within her that her prayer was answered—not that the fulfilment of her desire was immediate, but she had an assurance that it was certain. This assurance made her as joyful in the anticipation as in the possession. An immediate blessing always follows earnest and heartfelt prayer, though the blessing sought may be long delayed, or never granted in the form which the petitioner desires at the time. There is joy from the asking as well as from the receiving—joy from the consciousness that our cry has entered into the ear of our Father in heaven, and will not be disregarded by Him, whatever be the issue. **III. A consciousness of accepted prayer sweetens every temporal blessing.** "She did eat and drink." A child who really loves his parent feels his young life darkened, and much of his joy in existence gone, if that parent looks coldly on him. Doubtless Hannah had regarded her past condition as a mark of the absence of Divine favour, and this had deprived all the common mercies of her life of sweetness. But now she felt that the sun of God's approval was shining upon her, and this gilded with light every social and temporal blessing. It is this, and this only, that can turn life's water into wine.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 19 *and* 20.

The Birth of Samuel.

1. The vast importance of the birth of a child. Every child is a new thing in the earth—the *only* new thing in it. It has an identity separate from all the human creatures that have gone before it, or will come after it; in some points it differs from every one of them. Forces are set in motion upon the birth of every child that will not cease to exert an influence through the ages of eternity.

II. Godly families are the cradles of great men. The real greatness of a man consists in the development of all the faculties of the soul, and first, and above all, of the development of his conscience. If the waters of a stream flow through a channel in which there is impure matter, it will imbibe some of the poisonous particles, and carry them with it through many miles of its future course. So it is with a child's conscience. It takes its character from the character of those by whom he is surrounded. If he is born in a family of moral impurity his moral sense is defiled—the young life, passing through such a channel on its way to manhood, is tainted; and while the taint remains there can be no real greatness, for the conscience colours the entire life. As one drop of poisonous matter diffuses itself through every part of a vessel of water, so a defiled conscience makes its influence felt through all the words and deeds that go to make up life. But in a godly family the child's conscience is not only carefully guarded from all that might defile it, but the holy example and wise teaching of the parents develop and train it, and so there is every reason to

hope that the whole after-life will possess the first requisite of a great man—a healthy moral sense. Samuel could hardly have been the mighty power for good in Israel which he afterwards became, if he had not had the blessing of godly parentage, and consequently of early training in the fear of God. There have been many men in the world who have been great poets, great statesmen, great warriors—great with the greatness most esteemed by the world in general—but in how many of them has there been a moral taint, which has deprived their famous words or works of all real power for good, which has been a blot upon all their intellectual greatness. And of those who have been great in goodness as well as great in intellectual power, how large a proportion have been born in godly homes.

III. There is no blessing of earth greater than to be born in such a family. Such children are indeed "prevented with the blessings of God's goodness" (Psa. xxi. 3). Contrast the lot of such a child with that of the millions who first see the light in a home where God is never acknowledged—where the supreme importance of moral purity is never thought of—or worse still, of those whose earliest experiences are those of the lowest and most revolting exhibitions of crime where the infant breathes with its first breath the atmosphere of hell. Life, when it is most impressible, in such a home is surrounded by those who will stamp it with images and characters all but indelible—with ideas that will pollute the soul through its whole life. There is more mystery involved in the advent of a child into such an atmosphere than can be solved by any human mind—it must be left in the hand of Him whom we know to be the All Wise and Righteous Ruler of the universe. But how different is the advent of a child into a godly home. Blessings of all kinds—love and holy example, and tender and wise nurture are awaiting his arrival. It is as if clouds laden with refreshing showers hung in the sky before the seed is sown ready to descend upon it the moment it is placed in the earth. Prayers on his behalf ascend to heaven before he draws his first breath—holy plans and purposes are formed concerning him before he sees the light of day. We can imagine how it was with Hannah and Elkanah while they awaited the birth of this long-desired son—this gift of the Lord—and so it is in a greater or less degree with every godly parent as they look forward to receiving such a sacred trust. Is there any blessing greater than to begin life's journey under such propitious auspices?

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 19. They had ten miles to go; but "they worshipped before the Lord." This whet they held no let in their journey, but a furtherance rather, and as oil to the wheels. It is good to go in God's name.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 20. The child's name was the mother's memorial. As often as she looked into his infant face, or named him in her love, her soul would swell within her at the recollection of God's mercy. She saw the Divine gift in the child of her affection, and received a lesson of gratitude and dependence in his every smile and tear.—*Steel.*

Blessed was Hannah, not in *being* a mother, but in *becoming* one, not having been one at first. For the first is the lot of all her sex; but the second happiness is reserved for Hannah. Blessed, because of her child-bearing, not less blessed on account of all that had gone before it.—*Chrysostom.*

I do not find that Peninnah asked any son of God, yet she had store. Hannah begged hard for this one, and could not till now obtain him. They which are dearest to God do ofttimes, and with great difficulty, work out those blessings which fall into the mouths of the careless. . . . . As

this child was the son of his mother's prayers, and was consecrated to God ere his possibility of being; so now himself shall know, both how he came and whereunto he is ordained. . . . . He cannot so much as hear himself named; but he must needs remember both the extraordinary mercy of God and his mother's vow. . . . There is no necessity of significant names, but we cannot have too many monitors to put us in mind of our duty.—*Bishop Hall.*

When pious parents receive their children with calling on God and in His fear, then is every child a Samuel. *Starke.*

The fact that, in common with Isaac, John the Baptist, and Samson, his birth took place beyond all human hope and expectation was calculated to produce the conviction that God had some other object than to turn the sorrow of a woman into joy.—*Hengstenberg.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—VERSES 21—23.

SERVING GOD IN THE HOME AND IN THE TEMPLE.

I. An obedient recognition of Divine ordinances. 1. *As to place.* "And Elkanah went up to offer unto the Lord." The value of laws or ordinances depends upon the wisdom of him who institutes them, and our obligation to observe them depends upon the claim to obedience that he has upon us and upon their adaptation to meet our needs. In the time of Elkanah, the place of the ark was the place appointed by God where his people were to assemble to perform acts of special worship. Under the New Testament dispensation, Christians are commanded to assemble themselves together for the same purpose (Heb. x. 25), and the command is binding upon all because it has been given by Him who is fully acquainted with man's spiritual needs, and knows how those needs will be most fully met. 2. *As to time.* Ancient Israel was commanded to assemble together at special seasons and on special days. Although it may be disputed whether Christians are bound to observe any particular day, there can be no doubt that the regular observance of a special day such as the Christian Sabbath, is indispensable to the maintenance of a national sense of the existence of a God, and if it is not absolutely necessary to preserve divine and spiritual life in the individual soul, it is indispensable to its growth and vigour. The obligation of Christians to observe a "Lord's day" has its origin both in the Divine institution of the Sabbath at the Creation, in its recognition by Christ Himself (Mark ii. 27), and in the manifest adaptation to meet their spiritual needs. He who knows man's needs made the Sabbath for him, and to set it aside as unnecessary is to impute to Him ignorance as to the spiritual wants of His own creatures. We are as much bound to recognise a place and a period in which to meet for the public worship of God as the ancient Jew was. Christ Himself has attached a special promise to such a gathering in His name (Matt. xviii. 20), and in two instances on record, cheered his first disciples by fulfilling it even in His bodily presence on "the first day of the week" (John xx. 19-26). It is worthy of note that the divine ordinances were observed not only by Elkanah, but by "all his house," that is, as is evident from the following verses, by all who were not prevented by age or by home duties.

II. A service performed for God at home. "Hannah went not up," etc. Hannah, in her present circumstances, served God to more purpose by absenting herself for the time from the public worship of God. God permits His human creatures to be co-workers with Him in the accomplishment of His purposes. He had purposed to bring about a revival of true godliness in Israel by means of Samuel, but in bringing about the accomplishment of his purpose, He worked

through ordinary human channels and used human instrumentality. Hannah, by nourishing the bodily life of her child, and by training his infant mind in a knowledge of the God whose prophet he was to be, was a co-worker with God in the raising the nation to a higher spiritual condition. It is so in all God's purposes in relation to the world, whether in the kingdom of nature or of grace He has purposed that the earth shall bring forth her harvests year after year to supply man with bread. But He calls man to aid Him in the accomplishment of His purpose (Isa. xxviii. 26-29). And so in the spiritual kingdom. And when any man of God is raised up by Him for a great work, he is not the only instrument of its accomplishment, but all those who have helped to train him for God's services—especially his mother, if she has been faithful to her trust—have a share in the honour and joy. It may be questioned if anyone in the kingdom of Israel at this time was doing so great a work for God as Hannah in the performance of her unobtrusive work in the privacy of her home.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 23. Hannah looked upon her child, not as a child only, but as an offering; she had two reasons to love him, one from nature and one from grace. . . . Those who purpose to consecrate cups or vessels of gold to the service of God, while they keep them in their house until the day of consecration, look upon them no longer as common objects, and do not permit them to be carelessly or indifferently handled. So Hannah, with much more reason, nurtured her child with a special reference to his introduction to the temple; she loved him more than as an ordinary child, she regarded him as an offering to the Lord, looking upon herself as sanctified through him; indeed, her house had become a temple since it enclosed this priest, this prophet.—*Chrysostom.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24—28.

Vows.

I. When we pledge ourselves to a certain act or line of conduct on condition that God grants us a certain blessing, we must be very careful to fulfil our vow. If we enter into such a contract with a fellow-creature, we hold ourselves bound by honour to observe every jot and tittle of the contract. Let us be at least equally scrupulous in the performance of any pledge which we give to God. Hannah had placed before the Lord the conditions under which she would give to His service a son, to dwell in His house for ever. The petition had been granted on her own terms, and there is no holding back on her part. She evidently hastened to perform her vow; there was none of that deferring (Eccles. v. 4) which looks like a repenting of the promise made. "When she had weaned him"—as soon as ever his age permitted his separation from his mother's care—"she took him up with her." And the sacrifices of thanksgiving which accompanied the dedication of this darling child show that the gift was that of a "cheerful giver"—that this great act of devotion on her part was performed with gladness (Psa. c. 2).

II. Our faith is strengthened, and our gratitude deepened, when our vows can be paid on the very spot where they have been made. "Arise, and go up to Bethel" (Gen. xxxv. 1), said the Lord to Jacob. The command indicates that to visit the spot where he had fled from the face of Esau, and where he had dedicated himself to the service of God, would deepen the patriarch's gratitude

for all the mercy and truth that had followed him since, and would strengthen his faith in the "faithful Creator" and covenant-keeping God. "Arise, and go to Bethel" testifies that it is good to pay our vow in the place in which it was made. The very sight of the spot brings before us more vividly than anything else can do the circumstances of the past, and thus makes us realise more fully the blessings we have received in answer to the prayers then offered. Hannah was enabled to pay her vow in the very spot where she had made it: "I am the woman that stood by thee *here*, praying to the Lord," etc.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 28. A double sacrifice was celebrated; one of the victims is endowed with reason, and the other is not; the one is offered up by the priest, the other by Hannah. That which was offered by the mother was a far more costly sacrifice than that presented by the priest. For Hannah offered the fruit of her womb; she treads in the steps of Abraham, she emulates the self-sacrifice of the patriarch. But Abraham received back his son and led him away, but Hannah leaves hers in the temple for the rest of his days.—*Chrysostom.*

Hannah's piety did not cool when her wish was gratified.—*Steele.*

That God *gives* in answer to prayer, and that man *devotes* to God what he obtains, so that God *takes* again what He has given, or *lays claim* to it for the ends of His kingdom, is the law of reciprocity in the intercourse between the living God and His saints; the latter contribute nothing for the realisation of the special ends of His kingdom which they have not received from Him, and are not by Him enabled to contribute.—*Lange's Commentary.*

True religion is a divine life in the soul, which its author first tries and then honours. 1. It is a life of *faith*, *hope*, and *love*. 2. It is tried by *Satan* who will seek to place such men as Hophni and Phinehas at the altar, if it be but to distress and drive away from it such worshippers as Hannah. The *family* is often our furnace, it has pains as necessarily secret as severe; and where they can be told they are told in vain to any but God. Such was the family of Hannah. The *Church* itself will try the patience and faith of its true members. It will try whether we can acknowledge a true minister of God, and meekly bear with his infirmities, though, like Eli, he mistakes our case, and chills the heart which he should cherish; whether we can receive the promises of God from His mouth, though it sometimes speaks unadvisedly. The Church is a fire to try the Church. 3. But true religion will be owned and honoured of him who gave it, as was the case with Hannah. The Lord often does so beyond all that we ask or think. Hannah had asked for a *man-child*; but it was not in her contemplation to ask for a *Samuel*—that light of Israel—that prophet mighty in word and deed—that blessing and pattern to the world in every age.—*Cecil.*

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"And Hannah prayed."** "Hymns are wont to be comprehended under the name of prayers" (Ps. lxxi. 20). "It was the most ancient way of preserving the memory of things to posterity, poets being more ancient than historians or orators." *(Patrick.)* **"Mine Horn."** "There is no reason for supposing here a reference to the custom among Oriental women (Druses and others) of wearing silver horns on the head to which the veil is attached, and which, by their position, indicate the woman's position as maiden, wife, or mother. There is no trace of such a custom among the ancient Hebrews. The word translated *horn* is used of the horns of beasts, of horns for blowing and drinking, or for any horn-shaped vessel, and of a mountain peak. It is the symbol derived from horned beasts, which carry the head high in vigorous courage and consciousness of power." *(Lange's Commentary.)* "*Mine horn is exalted*" does not mean, I am proud, but "my power is great in the Lord." *(Keil.)* "This figure appears first here, and connects this song with that of David, in 2 Sam. xxii. 3, and is adopted in the Gospel, and applied to Christ in the song of Zacharias" (Luke i. 69). *(Wordsworth.)* "The mouth is '*enlarged*,' or '*opened*' wide, to proclaim the salvation before which the enemies would be dumb." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 2. **"Rock."** This figure is another connecting link which joins this song with that of Moses (Deut. xxxii. 4) with David, and all with Christ." *(Wordsworth.)* (See on this subject in Comments.) "The symbolical designation of the covenant-God by *Rock*, which occurs frequently, was suggested naturally by the configuration of the ground in Palestine, where masses of rock, surrounded by steep precipices, offered an image of solid and sure protection." *(Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 3. **"By Him actions are weighed."** Keil translates, "To Him deeds are weighed," that is to say, the acts of God are weighed, *i.e.*, are equal or just. Many expositors agree with him, and about an equal number understand it to signify that God weighs, or rightly estimates the actions of men.

Ver. 4. **"The bows of the mighty,"** etc. "Bows were a principal part of warriors' weapons and their girdles a principal part of their military habit" (*Patrick*).

Ver. 5. **"They that were full,"** etc. "See an instance in verse 36" (*Biblical Commentary*). **"Ceased"** either to be hungry or to work for bread. **"The barren hath borne seven,"** *i.e. many.* "Seven children are mentioned as the full number of the Divine blessing in children" (Ruth iv. 15).—*(Keil.)* "Here prophecy concerning the Church mingles with her hymn of praise."—*(Patrick.)* (On this subject see *Comments on the Song.*)

Ver 6. **"The Lord killeth,"** etc. *Killing* denotes (with a departure from the ordinary sense) bringing into the extremest misfortune and suffering, which oppresses the soul like the gloom of death, or brings it near to death—*making alive* is extricating from deadly sorrow and introducing into safety and joy.—See Deut. xxxii. 39, Psa. xxx. 3, etc. (*Lange's Commentary*).

Ver. 8. **"The beggar from the dunghill."** "This alludes to a form of wretchedness known in the East, and indicating the lowest degree of poverty and humiliation. The dunghill—a pile of horse, cow, or camel offal, heaped up to dry in the sun and serve as fuel—was and is piled up in the huts of the poor; and sometimes, from necessity, is the haunt of wandering mendicants, who, finding it in some outhouse outside the city, lodge there for want of better accommodation: so that the change that had been made in the social postion of Hannah appeared to her grateful heart as auspicious and as great as the elevation of a poor despised beggar to the highest and most dignified rank *(Fausset.)* **"The pillars of the earth."** "There is no need to find a geographical theory in a poetical statement. And even if it expresses the author's geographical views, it is not *the thought of the passage*, but only the *framework* of the thought; the real thought here is solely religious, and has nothing to do with physical science" *(Translator of Lange's Commentary).* Wordsworth calls it "a figurative expression derived from a palace or temple." Some understand by the *pillars*, the rulers of the earth.

Ver. 9. **"Keep the feet,"** etc. Either from *error* and *sin (Fausset)* or from *misfortune (Lange's Commentary).* **"Darkness."** Symbolic of misfortune.

Ver. 10. **"Thunder."** "Thunder is a premonitory sign of the approach of the Lord to judgment" *(Keil).* "Literally fulfilled in this history" *(Wordsworth).* **"The ends of the earth."** "The *object* of God's judicial interposition is not only the members of the chosen people, but the whole world" *(Lange's Commentary).* **"His anointed"** or "Messiah." The first time the word is used in Holy Scripture.

Ver. 11. **"Minister."** "The word is used in three senses in Scripture. 1. Of the service of both priests and Levites (Exod. xxviii. 35–43, etc.). 2. Of the ministrations of the Levites

as rendered to the priests (Numb. iii. 6), where the phrase is nearly identical with that used here. 3. Of any service, especially one rendered to a man of God (Num. xi. 28; 1 Kings xix. 21; 2 Kings vi. 15, etc.). The application of it to Samuel as ministering to the Lord before Eli the priest accords most exactly with Samuel's condition as a Levite" *(Biblical Commentary)*. "He must have been engaged in some occupation suited to his tender age, as in playing upon the cymbals, or other instruments of music; in lighting the lamps, or similar easy and interesting services" *(Fausset)*.

Ver. 12. "Sons of Belial." See on Chapter i. 16.

Ver. 13, 14. They were not content with the portions assigned to them by the Levitical law, namely, the heave-leg and wave-breast (Lev. vii. 30–34), but robbed the offerer of that portion which belonged to him while he was preparing it to celebrate the feast of thanksgiving before the Lord.

Ver. 15. "The fat," etc. This was the part of the animal which was to be offered to God (Lev. iii. 16, vii. 23, 25, etc.). "This was high contempt of God to demand their portion before God had His" *(Patrick)*. "In the case of the peace offerings, the offerer slew the animal himself at the door of the tabernacle and the priest poured the blood and burnt the fat" *(Biblical Commentary)*.

Ver. 17. "The young men." "Not the servants of the priests *(Keil)* but the priests themselves, the sons of Eli" *(Lange's Commentary)*.

Ver. 18. "But." The Levite-child is contrasted with the grown-up priest" *(Wordsworth)*. **"Ephod."** "It does not appear whether the Levites wore the ephod properly. Micah wore one, but that may have been in his character as priest (Judges xviii. 4, 6, 14), and David when he danced before the ark (2 Sam. vi. 14). Possibly this was a mark of Samuel's special dedication" *(Biblical Commentary)*.

Ver. 19. "Coat." *Meil*, rendered mantle in 1 Sam. xv. 27, xxviii. 14, etc. "It probably resembled the *robe* or '*Meil*' of the High-priest (Exod. xxviii. 31), but was made of course of some simpler material, and without the symbolical ornaments attached to the lower hem, by which that official dress was distinguished" *(Keil)*. "It is interesting to know that the garment which his mother made and brought to the infant prophet at her annual visit was a miniature of the official priestly tunic or robe; the same that the great prophet wore in mature years, and by which he was on one occasion actually identified. When the witch of Endor, in answer to Saul's inquiry, told him 'that an old man was come up covered with a meil,' Saul perceived that it was Samuel"—1 Sam. xxviii. 14. *(Smith's Biblical Dictionary)*.

Ver. 22. "Very old," "consequently listless" *(Patrick)*. **"The women that assembled."** The same phrase as that used in Exod. xxxviii. 8. Some commentators consider that these women were employed in spinning, etc., for the service of the tabernacle like those mentioned in Exod. xxxv. 25. Others, as Hengstenberg, look upon their service as purely spiritual, as that of Anna (Luke ii. 36). Others again regard them as simply worshippers. Kitto says that if they were employed in service they would have been *inside*, not *at the doors of* the tabernacle.

Ver. 25. "If one man sin against another," etc. "A man may intercede with God for remission of a penalty due to himself, but who shall venture to entreat for one who has outraged the majesty of God." *(Wordsworth.)*

Ver. 26. "In favour," etc. The same words as are used of Christ (Luke ii. 52).

Ver. 27. "A man of God." A prophet, as in 1 Kings xiii. 1, etc. "The only one mentioned since Deborah." *(Biblical Commentary.)* **"Thy Father."** "Eli was a descendant of Ithamar, the youngest son of Aaron" (1 Chron. xxiv. 3). . . . "The transfer of the high-priesthood to him must have taken place, because at the death of the last high-priest of the family of Eleazer Aaron's eldest son), the remaining son was too young and inexperienced to take his place." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 28. "Did I not give," etc. The bountiful provision made by God for His priests is mentioned as the great aggravation of the sins of Eli's sons. *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 31. "The judgment did not fall upon Eli's house immediately. His grandson Ahitub (1 Sam. xiv. 3), and Abiathar, Ahitub's grandson (1 Kings i. 25; ii. 26), successively held the office of high priest. So much importance in the East has always been attached to old age that it would be felt to be a great calamity, and sensibly lower the respectability of any family which could boast of few old men." *(Fausset.)* Abiathar, the last high priest of Eli's family, was deposed by Solomon, and the high-priesthood reverted to that of Eleazar, to whose family Zadok belonged (2 Sam. xv. 24; xvii. 15; xix. 12; xx. 25. 1 Kings ii. 27).

Ver. 32. "This was the captivity mentioned in Judges xviii. 30. *(Wordsworth.)*

Ver. 35. "A faithful priest." This probably refers, in the first instance, to Samuel, who was evidently called by God to perform priestly acts; and, secondly, to Zadok, the father of a long line of priests. It is also generally regarded as pointing on to the Messiah. "It would then seem best to regard it as announcing a *line* of faithful men." *(Tr. of Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 36. "A piece of silver." The word is used only here. It signifies a small piece of money, and has been rendered "a beggar's coin." "Commentators are divided in their opinion as to the historical allusions contained in this prophecy." *(Keil.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—VERSES 1—10.

Hannah's Song.

I. The end of a granted desire should be the beginning of praise. The desire of the husbandman ends when the last shock of corn is safely housed in the barn. Then comes the harvest song indicating that desire has been completed by fulfilment. The ploughing and sowing, the bearing of the precious seed, the toil, the hope, the fear, the patience are all things of the past, and the end of all these should be a beginning of something new—of a song of thanksgiving. So it will be in the kingdom of God at the end of the present dispensation. The groaning and travailing of the whole creation—the sin, the sorrow, the tears, and struggles of the present will one day be ended—the earnest expectation of the creature—the desire of the best of the human race in all worlds—the prayer of ages—will end in complete fulfilment: and the end of all the desire and longing of the present will be the beginning of praise. A "new song" will be sung to celebrate the incoming of the new era—the birth of the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet. iii. 13). The beginning of a perpetual thanksgiving will celebrate the end of the present state of things and the incoming of the new. And so it should always be in the life of the individual. It was so with Hannah. She had not experienced the consummation of her desire without experiencing deep sorrow—without long and patient waiting upon God. But the desire, the tears, the hope were behind her. The child had been born, the son had been given. The vow had been paid and the gift of the Lord had been given back to Him. The tide of joy and gratitude had been rising higher and higher in her heart from the hour in which she left her home until she stood in the very same spot where she had stood before—"a woman sorrowful and grieved in spirit." And now she was a joyful mother, and gladness flooded her soul and burst forth into a mighty song of exultation and thanksgiving.

II. The experience of one individual is often symbolic and prophetic of the experience of many. The light that shone upon Paul on his way to Damascus pained and blinded him at first. And the bodily pain and blindness were symbolic of the pain and darkness of his soul from the light which shined into his soul. But out of the darkness and sorrow came light and joy, such as he had never known before. Of the experience of how many was this experience of Paul symbolic and prophetic! How many through his pain and joy were brought to pass through a like experience! To how many was the soul transition of this man an earnest of the same transition from darkness to light! Hannah's experience was symbolic and prophetic of what was to be the experience of many of her nation. Those who were godly among them had been long grieved at heart because of the persecution of their enemies—because it seemed, indeed, as if God had forgotten to be gracious to His own people. Many a time, doubtless, had they asked Gideon's question—"*If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of?*"

(Judges vi. 13). But a new era was now to begin. Hannah's joy coming after her long sorrow was anticipatory of a time when the garment of praise should take the place of the spirit of heaviness with all true patriots and servants of God in the land of Israel.

III. The language of the human soul in one age is often fitted to express its feelings in all ages. A common life expresses its existence in the same general outward form from age to age. The life of the rose or of the lily finds expression in the same general outward form to-day as it did when God first called it into existence. There are modifications and individual distinctions, but the general outline is the same. So with the life of the human soul. Although time modifies the form in which it gives expression to its thoughts, although each individual has an experience which in some respects differs from that of any other creature, yet the language spoken ages ago finds an echo in the hearts of men and women in each generation, and expresses their feelings as well as it expresses the feelings of the person who first uttered them. How perfectly does the language of some of the Psalms, for instance, fit the experience of many men and women in this nineteenth century. What a close resemblance there is between this song of the happy mother of Israel's prophet, and that of the mother of that prophet, priest, and king, who was not the Saviour of Israel merely, but the Saviour of the world. There are slight modifications, but the great backbone of thought running through the one is the same as that in the other. And the same words, with slight changes of expression, might be used by any soul who had emerged from a long night of sorrow and darkness into a new and brighter epoch in its history, and as a matter of fact it has been so used by the Church of God in all ages, and will be until time shall be no longer. These thoughts are suggested by the song as a whole. We will now notice its main subjects.

I. That there is one God in contradistinction to many. "There is none beside Thee." The human soul and the world around us speak alike of the *oneness* of God. The heavens that declare His glory, and the firmament that showeth His handy work speak of One Supreme Ruler who controls all the forces by which the hosts of heaven move in their appointed paths. The vast machine has many complications, but the unity of its movements and operations bear the stamp of *one ruling mind.* The human soul cries out for One God—for one distinct and over-ruling power above all the principalities and powers of the universe. The Bible declares unmistakably that there is such a Being. There is one "*everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who hath meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance,*" and none "*instructed Him, or taught Him knowledge, or showed to Him the way of understanding*" (Isa. lx.). He alone is the "*King eternal, immortal, invisible*" (1 Tim. i. 17), who "*doeth according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth*" (Dan. iv. 35). The human soul may well rejoice in the knowledge that its destinies and the destinies of all the creatures of the universe are in the hands of a distinct identity like itself, yet so much greater and more powerful as to be able to control all the apparently conflicting forces which are at work into a complete and perfect harmony for the good of His creatures. The Israel of Jehovah in all ages have reason to rejoice in the knowledge that "the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. vi. 4).

II. That this one God is pure in His character. "There is none holy as the Lord." If a human creature who holds in his hands the earthly destinies of other creatures (who are inferior to him in power) is lawless and wicked, of what

misery may he be the cause! When an earthly judge, although skilful and learned, is known to be morally bad, we feel that his want of purity is not only injurious to himself, but may affect the destinies of those upon whom he is called to pass sentence. So with any ruler or judge of men in any capacity: purity of character, perfect integrity (so far as a human creature can be pure and upright), is felt to be indispensable to the well-being of those whom they govern or whom they judge. If this be so in the case of a human and finite being, how much more so is it in the case of the Almighty and Infinite God? If such a thing as a moral flaw in His character could be conceived, how terrible would be the issue! He who is to judge the world must be perfectly righteous. There must be nothing in His feelings and disposition that would tend to influence Him to do anything but the strictest justice. Seeing that the destinies of untold millions are in His hands, He must be absolutely without spot in His moral character. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25) But in order to do right at all times He must be absolutely incorruptible and undefiled. And this He is declared to be, this He has shown Himself to be. He has shown it in *His hatred to sin.* A man's moral purity, his holiness, may be estimated by the abhorrence in which he holds all moral impurity—anything which can defile his own soul and the souls of others. That God hates sin may be seen *in the searching and binding character of His law.* Human lawgivers make laws which deal with man's outward life—which have to do with him as a citizen rather than as a man. If he abstains from certain outward actions, the law allows him to live unmolested. But God's law is so holy that it penetrates into the spirit, legislates concerning thoughts and feelings, passes sentence upon hidden motives as well as upon visible actions. The "exceeding broadness" (Psa. cxix. 96) of the law reveals the Lawgiver's hatred to sin, and His consequent moral purity. And God's *hatred to sin,* and, therefore, His *holiness* is seen in *in the extent of the sacrifice He has made to put away sin.* A human ruler's abhorrence of any evil law or custom may be estimated by the efforts he makes to abolish it; by the self-sacrifice he is willing to undergo to rid his country of the curse. In nothing is the absolute holiness of God seen so plainly as in the fact that He "gave His only-begotten Son" to "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. ix. 26). Those who sing the song of the *Lamb slain* glorify the name of the Lord for His *holiness* (Rev. xv. 3, 4). And the contemplation of His work o redemption gives His saints on earth the most assuring proof of that holiness "at the remembrance" of which they join the first singer of this song in "giving thanks" (Psa. xxx. 4).

III. That immutability is a necessary consequence of God's absolute purity. "Neither is there any rock like our God." The unchangeableness of any human being depends upon his goodness and upon the length of time he has been good. He will be unchangeable in his feelings and actions in proportion to his moral purity, and the longer he has lived a holy life the more fixed and rock-like will be his character. If a man has pursued a line of righteous conduct for half-a-century—if in all that time he has been a man of unblemished integrity—everyone will feel that he is less likely to change now than he was fifty years ago. Every year that has passed over his head—every step that he has taken in the path of uprightness—has added something to the immutability of his character. God has ever been perfectly holy—holiness is His most important attribute—the one which forms the most weighty theme of the adoration of those of His creatures who are nearest to Him in moral character (Isa. vi. 3). And because He is so holy He must be unchangeable in His character. His everlasting holiness is a guarantee that He will always be the same in thought, and word, and deed; while He remains the Holy One of Eternity, He must continue to be the un-

changeable God (Mal. iii. 6). And that God is thus unchangeable may well furnish men with a theme of song. It is an instinct of humanity to reach out after something less changeable than themselves—to endeavour to lay hold of some object to which, as to a rock, they may anchor for rest and security. All the efforts of men to secure for themselves permanent positions in the world—to ensure to themselves and to their families a source of livelihood which will not fail them—are indications of their desire for a rock of some kind upon which they may rest. That upon which they place their dependence may be a very unworthy object of trust for an immortal spirit, yet men will make a rock of any object rather than have none. But those who, like Hannah, know the holy and unchangeable God, make Him, and Him only, the object of their entire trust—the Rock of their souls. They know from joyful experience that in all their need He has been, and ever will be, "*a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall*" (Isa. xxv. 4).

IV. God is likewise to be rejoiced in as a God of knowledge. "The Lord is a God of knowledge," etc. 1. *He knows Himself.* This is more than any human creature can assert concerning his own identity. The anatomist who can describe every bone and vein and nerve in the human body is looked upon as a man of knowledge, but when he has done this there are many mysteries connected even with the body that are utterly beyond his grasp—he stands before them in absolute ignorance. The student of man's mind is considered to be a man of knowledge if he can say something instructive concerning the world of thought and feeling within man—if he can analyse the operations of the mind and classify the mental faculties and throw some light upon the relations of body and soul. Yet when he has said all, how little has he said which can unfold to us the mystery of our own existence—how little does the wisest man know concerning himself. But God has a perfect knowledge of His own nature, He never returns from any reflection upon Himself with any mist of ignorance resting upon Him—He comprehends the whole length and breadth and depth and height of His own Infinite Being. 2. *He has a perfect knowledge of His own actions.* "By Him actions are weighed"—not only the acts of men but His own. Man cannot pretend to any perfect judgment of his own actions. He knows not the real value of his own deeds—he does not know whither they will tend—he can only come to an approximate estimate of his own motives. But God can perfectly weigh His acts—He knows exactly what will be their effect—He has a perfect knowledge of the motives which prompt them. 3. *Having this perfect knowledge of Himself and of all that He does, the Divine Being must know man in all the mystery of his complicated being, and must be able perfectly to estimate the worth of every human action.* The greater includes the less. He who made man must comprehend the nature of his existence; He knows what constitutes life; He comprehends how mind acts upon matter, and sees the subtle link which unites soul and body. And in the matter of human actions, He "*is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and all things are naked and opened in the eyes of Him with whom we have to do*" (Heb. iv. 12-13). The motives that prompt human deeds, the influence that those deeds will have upon future ages, the nature of the human will which is behind every human deed are all to Him as an open book. 4. *The proper condition of heart in the presence of such a God is humility.* "Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth." Limited knowledge on any subject should make men humble in the presence of those who are better informed. It ill becomes such to assume to dictate to and instruct those who are far more competent to speak upon the matter. How much more should man's limited knowledge of himself and of his Creator—of his own

actions, and of the actions of the All-Wise and All-knowing God—cause him, like Job, to "lay his hand upon his mouth" (Job xl. 4). Unable as he is rightly to weigh even his own actions, how can he dare to constitute himself a judge in what seems to him dark in the mysteries of the Divine dealings. The only condition of heart proper to finite creatures is that of Him "who is of a contrite spirit," and who "trembles" at the Divine Word (Isa. lxvi. 2). Our own ignorance and our conviction of God's infinite knowledge should lead us to put unreserved faith in His declarations, and yield uncompromising obedience to His commands. We make the knowledge of a fellow-man a ground of confidence, and we show our confidence by obeying their word. Our narrow outlook around us and beyond us makes safety to be found only in listening to the words of "the God of Knowledge," in striving to conform our lives to His revealed will, and leaving the result with confident trust in His hands.

V. This holy immutable God of Knowledge is the author of those inversions of the ordinary course of nature which often occur in a manner totally unforeseen and unexpected. "The bows of the mighty are broken. . . . . The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich. . . . . He raiseth up the poor out of the dust," etc. The natural law of the world is that the strong will hold on their way against what is weak, and that they, being in power, shall remain in possession. It is a foregone conclusion that the warrior who has the greatest force at his command will win the victory. Men expect the race will be won by the swift, and the battle by the strong. But God has other forces which He can bring into the field, and if He is not "on the side of the great battalions" He will bring about such unlooked for combinations that those who have fallen in the struggle will stand upright, "being girded with power," and those who have been mighty will be overthrown, and the lame will take the prey. When the forces of Egypt overtook the Israelites at Pi-hahiroth, the natural conclusion of a looker-on would have been that nothing could prevent the slaves so lately made free from being overmastered and retaken into bondage. But God, being on the side of the weak, brought auxiliaries into the combat such as Pharaoh had never dreamt of having to fight against. The water of the Red Sea was turned into an opposing force on behalf of the oppressed, and the army of Egypt was overthrown by a power against which their horsemen and chariots and their mighty men were utterly powerless. Between Egypt and Israel there was no comparison as to natural strength, but the Lord of nations brought supernatural reinforcements to the aid of the naturally weak, and thus "the bows of the mighty were broken, and they that stumbled were girded with strength." The woman who first uttered these words had long been walking through life with a heavy burden of sorrow weighing her to the earth: gladness and exultation seemed to be the portion of her persecutor, but none seemed destined for her. But the Lord who "bringeth low and lifteth up," brought laws into operation which entirely changed the colour of her existence, and from being an object of scorn she became most unexpectedly raised to a position of more than ordinary honour. 1. *These unseen and unknown laws are generally brought into operation in order to punish the strong for their oppression of the weak.* God alone is responsible for these inequalities in national or individual life; and because He is so, He will take account of those who, being endowed with greater physical or mental advantages, use them to lord it over those who have not been so favoured. Hannah's sorrow arose from a cause entirely beyond her own control, and those who oppressed her because of it were guilty of a great sin against God Himself. In the exaltation of her despised rival, Peninnah receives a just punishment for her wickedness; from the birth of Samuel her influence in the family must have declined, and none of her children are even mentioned in the sacred history, while that of Hannah's son was honoured throughout his nation during his life, and is held in

honour now that two thousand years have passed away. And so it is with the rise of one nation on the stage of history and the decline and fall of another. "*Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted and drunken, but not with wine: Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of His people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over*" (Isa. li. 21–23). Such is the method of the Divine government—there is a purpose in this subversion of natural order, and that purpose is retribution to the strong oppressor who has trampled on the rights of the weak. 2. *God has a just right and reason so to intervene.* "For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them." He is the proprietor of the earth—the land upon which the oppressor dwells is His by the most indisputable right—that of creation. The human proprietor claims a right over that which he has purchased—he can eject tenants from his property who do not meet his just demands. How much more is it the prerogative of Him who called the earth into being to eject from their dominion over it those who disregard His just demands, and abuse the power and the position which He has entrusted to them? God had a right to call Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite. He had a right to sweep the inhabitants of the cities of the plain from off the face of His earth when they so grossly defiled their fair inheritance. He had a right to call Moses and David from following the sheep, and set them in high places, to fulfil His eternal purposes. He had a right to take Nebuchadnezzar from his throne, and make his dwelling with the beasts of the field, until he knew "*that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will*," and until he acknowledged that all "*His ways are judgment, and those who walk in pride He is able to abase*" (Dan. iv. 25–37). "*The earth is the Lord's*," and "*they that dwell therein*" (Ps. xxiv. 1), and He, by right of proprietorship, puts in an absolute claim to dispose of that which belongs to Him as He sees best.

VI. God also bestows and takes away human life. "He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." 1. *He alone can give life.* There are many things in which man can imitate God. He can imitate God's benevolence by bestowing upon his fellow creatures gifts which will sustain and embellish their existence. He can be, to some extent, an imitator of God's character (Ephes. v. 1). But he can in no way imitate Him as the Giver of life. In that the Creator stands absolutely alone in the universe—this is His sole prerogative. Human life is continued in the world by the instrumentality of man, but human parents are but instruments. In this respect there can be no likeness between man and God. God is the only Being who has "life in Himself" (John v. 26). His is the only independent life, the highest archangel—he who is permitted to draw the nearest to the inaccessible light wherein dwells the Divine Majesty—is as much dependent for existence upon the only source of life as the tiniest insect that crawls beneath our feet. He was not until God called him into existence, and that existence is sustained only by Him who gave it at the first. Of One alone can it be said that He "hath immortality" (1 Tim. vi. 16), because all others receive it as a gift from Him. 2. *He only has the power and the right to take life.* He who gave has a right to take, and He only does take it. For whatever may be the second cause coming between, it is by Divine appointment that men die. Coming to the grave is not a debt of nature, but a Divine appointment. Nature is inexorable in exacting her debts—she works always by laws which she cannot set aside. She is strong enough to kill, but not strong enough to make an exception to the

rule—she cannot go out of her destined course to serve the highest purpose—to favour the most holy character. But there have been exceptions to the universal law of death—exceptions which have been made by Him who is the Lord of Nature, and who can set aside her claims—can leave her debt unpaid when He sees fit. Nature did not make the law, because she has no power to make exceptions to the rule. It is God alone who "bringeth to the grave." Death is not a chance which happens unto us. The arrow that entered between the joints of Ahab's armour came from a bow "drawn at a venture," but the arrow winged its way by Divine appointment. And so it is with all death's arrows, not one but hits the mark to which God has destined it. But it must be remembered that the appointment of death was not part of God's original plan in relation to men. Although it is now "appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. ix. 27), it was not so from the beginning. God's purpose concerning man at the first was to give life, and not to take it away; to bestow upon His creature an undying existence, a perfect and unending life of body as well as of soul. It is man's disobedience alone which has brought about the Divine appointment of death. "Going to the grave" is not the outcome of God's original purpose concerning man, but an appointed penalty for man's transgression. Death being thus a Divine appointment, dying should be regarded as a duty to be cheerfully discharged. Men face death bravely and cheerfully when they feel that their country or their earthly ruler has appointed them to it. The good man should learn from such examples to die as a duty of Divine appointment. A Christian ought to die cheerfully, seeing he dies by the command of the Lord of life. This thought ought to reconcile him to the inevitable, and help him to meet the last enemy without dismay. In proportion as a fellow-creature is good, we trust him with our life—with interests that are dearer to us than life. In proportion as he is wise as well as good—especially if he is powerful in addition to his wisdom and his goodness—our confidence in him is increased, our feeling of security in his hands is strengthened. The claim of the Eternal and Infinite God to kill and to make alive rests not only upon His power, but upon His character. He is not only the Author of life, but He is the King who cannot wrong any of his subjects, the Judge of all the earth who must, from the necessity of his nature, do right at all times to all His creatures. If God kills, it is not only because He takes what is His own, but because He is doing what is the best thing to be done, and in the best manner. 3. *The resurrection from the dead depends upon the Giver of life.* He not only "bringeth down to the grave," but He "bringeth up." (*a*) This we might have regarded as probable if we had no revelation upon the subject. We might have concluded that He who at first "breathed into man the breath of life," and thus made him a "living soul," could at His pleasure reanimate the dust and bring life again out of death. If God could give life where there was no life, is it not highly probable that He can give it again where it has once existed? (*b*) That He has done so is a matter of history. We have it upon reliable authority that He has restored dead men to life—that He has reanimated the lifeless clay. (*c*) That He must do this for all mankind is certain. Those who make promises ought to perform them if they are able to do so. If a man promises to redeem a pledged garment of his poorer brother, and is able to fulfil his promise, ought he not to do it, knowing as he does that his needy brother is expecting anxiously the promised raiment to cover his scantily clothed body? The raiment of God's children is held in pledge by death—He holds the garment until the time of the "redemption of the body" (Rom. viii. 23). God has promised to redeem that raiment, and He holds Himself bound to fulfil His promise, and we hold him bound also. Christ has given His word to bring from the grave both the just and the unjust—"*The hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall*

come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation" (John v. 28, 29). The vision of the seer has pictured for us that great redemption day—that day of "bringing up from the grave" of the human race (Rev. xx. 12, 13).

VII. In all the acts of His providence, in all the unlooked-for changes which He brings to pass, God has a special oversight of His own children. "He shall keep the feet *of His saints.*" 1. *The character of the persons whose feet are kept—"Saints."* Sainthood implies a soul transition. A man that is known to have been born poor and is found in after life to be living in wealth is known to have experienced a great transition in his outward circumstances. By what means or at what time in his life this change took place may not be revealed, but that it has taken place is a certainty. So with a saint. Such a man is in a condition to which he was not born. Sainthood is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). Therefore every human saint has been the subject of a soul-change. He may have been suddenly raised from a state of spiritual poverty to wealth, or he may have acquired his riches by degrees—increasing little by little in his knowledge of God and in confidence in His character. 2. *The change has taken place by the consent of his will.* Change of will brings about a change of position. If a child who hated his lessons can be made willing to learn, his position in relation to knowledge is at once changed. A sinner passes into a saint by becoming willing to learn of the Holy One how to become holy. Willingness is the bridge by which the sinner passes from a state of opposition to God into a state of reconciliation to Him, and being thus reconciled to God is to be brought into that fellowship with Him which constitutes sainthood. The entire process of the transition is described by the Apostle in 1 John i. 5-9. Fellowship with God based upon a knowledge of His character makes a man a saint, but before this knowledge can be attained there must be a willingness to learn. 3. *The saint needs a keeper for his feet.* The child who has but just learned to walk needs a steady and strong hand to guide his steps. The person who "keeps his feet" must possess a wisdom and strength superior to that of the child's. God is a guide and an upholder of the steps of His saints. He alone is "able to keep them from falling" (Jude 24). They cannot see the dangers in the distance coming to meet them, or even those which are now about their path. Hence their need of an eye that can discern them, and a hand that can deliver from them, a "God of knowledge," who is perfectly acquainted with every danger to which they can be exposed, and a God of such absolute power as to be able to deliver them. And His word of promise to each one is *"Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness* (Isa. xli. 10). Their weakness and their ignorance are both elements of danger, and both are fully met by their Allwise and Omnipotent Keeper. The other part of the verse implies that they are surrounded by enemies, both seen and unseen, who do not fail to watch for their halting, and lose no opportunity they can lay hold of to trip them up; but "the wicked shall be silent in darkness, and by strength shall no man prevail" against the saints of God. They may, and often do, prevail against a saint's *earthly possessions*, and even against his *life*. Jezebel by strength did "prevail" against Naboth's vineyard, against his life. For the time she was paramount against a good man. Herodias did likewise prevail against the liberty and life of John the Baptist, and her strength was strong enough to silence the voice that had been lifted up against her crimes. And in many like cases the wicked have prevailed against the earthly prosperity and life of the saints of God by His permissive providence. But notwithstanding this permissive clause in the Divine code—notwithstanding the licence that God thus gives to the enemies of His saints—there is no relaxing of

His hold, either of the saint or the sinner. The feet of the saint are still upheld, and when they pass through the waters and the fire of temptation and persecution they "*shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon them* (Isa. xliii. 2), their character and all their real interests shall come through the trial without loss or injury. 4. *The keeping of the saints' feet arise from God's special inheritance in them.* They are "His saints." The mother watches her child's feet because the child is her own. She may have a general interest in all children, but the feet of *her own* child are the objects of her most watchful love. If she is a godly mother, she not only keeps the feet of her child's body, but she cares unceasingly for the feet of the moral nature. She lays herself out to guide and to guard the spiritual as well as the natural life. All who are saints are God's purchased possession, and His special relation to them, and theirs to Him, makes sure an unceasing care on His part for all their real interests.

VIII. The inference to be drawn from a contemplation of God's character and government is, that contention against Him is vain. 1. *He can overcome His adversaries by His physical omnipotence.* "Out of heaven He shall thunder upon them." God's manifestations of power in the material world are sometimes of such a nature as to make men feel their utter powerlessness in His hands. When the seaman finds that all his efforts to guide his vessel are as useless as the dashing of the sea-spray against the rock, he becomes conscious of a power which is far beyond that of human skill and science. When the lightnings flash through the heavens and the thunder shakes the earth, we feel most deeply how passive we are in the hands of the Almighty Being, who can thus hold back and roll up the clouds of heaven. At such times we not only *know* how useless it is to contend with God, but we are made to *feel* it; we are conscious that to contend with One who has such powerful physical forces at His beck is as vain as it is wicked. The voice of God's thunder made even the heart of the hardened Pharaoh to quake and to acknowledge himself defeated (Exod. ix. 27, 28), and all God's mighty manifestations in the natural world should lead His creatures to humble themselves before Him. 2 *He can confound them by His superior wisdom and goodness.* "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth." The opponent in military warfare who can use the movements of his adversary to work his defeat and can carry the battle into his very camp and overthrow him on his own ground, is not one whom an enemy cares to meet. Neither is the opponent in argument to be despised who can turn a man's own reasonings against him and confound him by his own words. God has done this with His adversaries over and over again. He has made the plans of the wicked instrumental in carrying out His own purposes and in working out their own destruction. Men ought by this time to have learned how useless it is to contend with One who "*taketh the wise in their own craftiness:*" so that "*the counsel of the froward is carried headlong*" (Job v. 13). The imperfect knowledge of a human judge may enable men successfully to contend against him. The fact that he is ignorant of many things that he ought to know may defeat the ends of justice, and lead him to an erroneous decision. But God is a perfect judge—His decisions are always perfectly just and equitable, because he lacks neither the perfect knowledge nor the perfect righteousness, out of which must come a perfect ruler. When the final judgment comes—when the Son of man shall "sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations" (Matt. xxv. 31, 32), all men will feel that it is utterly useless to seek to evade His searching scrutiny—that His holiness and His omniscience make certain the overthrow of all that is opposed to Him. "*The Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him*" (Jude 14, 15).

IX. The end of confounding the wicked and the end of all God's dealings with men is the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness. "He shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His Anointed." In nature all change tends to the development of perfection. The blade and the green ear are but stepping-stones to the fully ripened grain. The bud unfolds into the perfect flower, the flower is followed by the fruit. So is it in God's kingdom. All the overturnings and changes, all the judgments upon the ungodly, are but stepping-stones to the establishment of the kingdom of righteousness. All the kings who have ever sat upon the thrones of the world have been preparing the way for the rule of "His King," who is one day to rule all the nations. Looking away into the future under the influence of the Spirit of God, Hannah foretells the advent of a king who should reign in righteousness, and anticipates the Psalmist King of Israel when he sang of Him who should "*judge the poor of the people*" and "*save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor;*" who shall "*have dominion also from sea and to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth;*" whose "*name shall endure for ever, and be continued as long as the sun;*" and whom "*all nations shall call blessed.*" (Psalms lxxvi.) To the undisputed reign of this King all the present dealings of God with men and nations are tending.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. The repetition of "in the Lord" emphasises the fact that the joyous frame of mind and lofty consciousness of power has its root in the Lord, and pre-supposes the most intimate communion with the living God. The mouth "*opened wide* over mine enemies" intimates that the joy and courage that filled her soul had found utterance.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Hannah's song of praise compared with her former prayer. 1. She was then in "bitterness of soul" (i. 10); now her "heart rejoiceth." 2. Then she was "humiliated" (i. 5, 8, 11); now she is "exalted." 3. Then her adversary "provoked her" (i. 6); now her "mouth is opened wide over her enemies." 4. Then she "poured out her soul before the Lord" (i. 15); now she "rejoices in His salvation." Often we remember to pray, and then forget to praise.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

There is not one petition in all this holy hymn, but thanksgiving is a principal part of prayer; it is also an artificial begging.—*Trapp.*

How has Hannah's glory been exalted? "In the Lord," saith she. The elevation is no more dangerous, for it has a solid foundation, a root that cannot be shaken. The glory that comes from men is accompanied by the feebleness of those who give it, so that it is easily overthrown, but it is not so with the glory which comes from God. It is the glory of which the prophet speaks (Isa. xl. 6, 7, 8). Hannah is a remarkable example of this truth. Kings, generals, great men, are forgotten, notwithstanding all their efforts to make their names immortal, notwithstanding the magnificent tombs that they build, the statues that they erect, the monuments they leave as tokens of their success, their very names are forgotten. But Hannah is celebrated to-day throughout all the world, her glory is celebrated wherever the sun sheds its light. . . . . For, when God glorifies anyone, death comes in vain, time passes on in vain, the glory of the mortal survives, and its flowers are kept unfading: nothing can throw a shadow upon that brightness.—*Chrysostom.*

Ver. 2. God manifests Himself as holy in the government of the kingdom of His grace by His guidance of the righteous to salvation.—*Keil.*

Two characteristics of the life of God's children in their relation to the

living God: 1. The humble *reverence* before Him, in view of His *holiness*. 2. The heartiest *confidence* in Him, in view of His *unchangeable faithfulness*.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Holiness is a chief and super-eminent perfection of God, that wherein the Divine excellence doth chiefly consist. Therefore it is the most frequent epithet given to His name in Scripture. We never read *mighty name* or *wise name*, but frequently *holy name*. The holiness of God is His *glory* and *beauty*. Therefore He is said to be "glorious in holiness." He is *mighty* in power, and *rich* in grace, and *glorious* in holiness. —*Wisheart.*

Ver. 3. The manner of God's weighing actions. 1. With perfect knowledge. 2. With absolute rectitude (Ver. 2). 3. With immutable justice (Ver. 2).—*Lange's Commentary.*

The weighed or righteous acts of God (see Keil's rendering in Critical Notes) are described in Vers. 4–8 in great and general traits, as displayed in the government of His kingdom, through the marvellous changes which occur in the circumstances connected with the lives of the righteous and the wicked.—*Keil.*

I. The perfection of God's knowledge. 1. It is present and actual; His eye is always open, and everything is in the view of it. The knowledge of the creature is more power than act; it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we actually know, and 'tis but one thing that we can fix our thoughts upon at once. But the knowledge of God is an actual and steady comprehension of things, all objects are at once in the view of the Divine understanding. 2. It is intimate and thorough. Our knowledge glides upon the superficies of things; we do not know things in their realities but as they appear and are represented to us in all their masks and disguises: but God knows things throughout, all that can be known of them. 3. It is clear and distinct. We are often deceived with the near likeness and resemblance of things, and mistake one thing for another; our knowledge is but a twilight, we see things many times together and in a heap, and do but know them in gross. But those things which are of the least consideration, and have the greatest likeness to one another, *the very hairs of your head*, are severally and distinctly known to God. 4. It is certain and infallible. Everything almost imposes upon our understandings, and tinctures our minds; our temper and complexion, our education and prejudice, our interest and advantage, our humours and distempers, these all misrepresent things and betray us into error: but the Divine understanding is a clear, fixed, constant, and undisturbed light, a pure mirror that receives no stain from affection, or interest, or any such thing. 5. It is easy and without difficulty. We must dig deep for knowledge and take a great deal of pains to know a little; we strive to comprehend some things, but they are so vast that we cannot; other things are at such a distance, that our understanding is too weak to discern them; others so little, so small and nice, that our understanding cannot lay hold of them; but God's understanding being infinite, it is a vast comprehension of all things without difficulty or pain. **II. God's knowledge of the heart teaches**—1. The folly of hypocrisy. If we deal with men this is not a very wise way, for there is danger of discovery even from them, therefore the best way for a man to seem to be anything is really to be what he would appear; but having to deal with God, to whom all our disguises are apparent, 'tis a madness to hide our iniquity in our bosoms. 2. Charge yourselves with inward purity and holiness, because of the pure eyes which behold the most secret motions of your souls. Fear and shame from men lay a great restraint upon our outward actions, but what a strange freedom do we take within our own breasts! This is an argument of the secret atheism that lies at the bottom of our hearts. 3. This is a matter of encouragement to us in many cases—"*When my*

heart is overwhelmed within me, then Thou knowest my path" (Ps. cxliii. 3) —in cases of difficulty which depend upon the hearts of other men, which, though we do not know, yet God knows them. But especially is this a matter of comfort to us when we suffer by the calumnies and reproaches of men, when the world chargeth us with crimes, then to be able to appeal to the Searcher of hearts. 4. This renders all deep and profound policies of the wicked a vain thing. God sees those cobwebs which they are spinning, and can blow them away at a breath. 5. If God only knows the hearts of men, then what art thou, O man, that judgest another's heart? Will thou assume to thyself the prerogative of God?—*Tillotson.*

Vers. 4, 5. Every power which will be something in itself is destroyed by the Lord; every weakness, which despairs of itself, is transformed into power.—*Von Gerlach.*

Vers. 4–8. *The unity amid change of the opposite ways* which the *pious* and the *ungodly* must go. 1. *One* starting point, the Lord's inscrutable will, which determines them. 2. *One* hand, the Almighty hand of the Lord which leads them. 3. *One* goal at which they end, humble submission under that hand. *The wonderful guidance of the children of men in quite opposite ways.* 1. The opposite *direction* in which they go, *(a)* from the height to the depth, *(b)* from the depth to the height. 2. The opposite *design* which the Lord has therein with men, *(a)* to lead them from the heights of pride and haughty self-complacency to humble submission under His unlimited power, *(b)* to exalt them from the depths of humble self-renunciation to a blessed life in the enjoyment of His free grace. 3. The opposite *end*, according as men cause the divine design to be fulfilled or defeated in them: *(a)* everlasting destruction without God, *(b)* everlasting salvation and life in, and with God.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Vers. 3–10. The *contrasts which the change in the relations of human life presents to us in the light of Divine truth.* 1. God's *holiness* and man's *sin.* 2. God's *almightiness* and man's *powerlessness.* 3. God's *gracious design* and man's *destruction.*—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 5. The view held by some, that in Hannah's barrenness and subsequent fruitfulness there is a mystical or typical meaning, deserves consideration. Hannah is said to be the type of the Christian Church, at first barren and reviled, afterwards fruitful and rejoicing. As to such typical character we must be guided, not by outward resemblances, but by fixed principles of Biblical interpretation. These facts may guide us to a decision—1. God's relation to His people is set forth under the figure of marriage (Isa. liv., Jer. iii., Hosea i.—iii.) 2. Isaiah (liv. 1) describes God's spiritual people as barren, yet with the promise of many children. 3. Paul (Gal. iv. 27) quotes this passage of Isaiah, refers it to the Church of Christ as distinguished from the Jewish dispensation, and declares that this antithesis is given in Sarah and Hagar. . . . What he declares is that Sarah is the mother of the child of *promise*, while Hagar's child is the product of natural fruitfulness. . . . Throughout his argument it is the spiritual element of promise and faith on which Sarah's typical position is based. Only, therefore, where we can show such spiritual element are we justified in supposing a typical character. There must be involved the truth that the origination and maintenance of God's people depend on His promise, and not on human strength. This is not necessarily involved in the history of every barren woman who becomes fruitful. . . . Hannah seems to be simply a pious mother, whose prayer for a son, contrary to human probabilities, is granted.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 6. He layeth men for dead, and then reviveth them, as 2 Cor. i. 9, 10.

That great apostle was "in death's often;" and those ancient confessors cry out, "for Thy sake are we killed all the day long" (Rom. viii. 36).—*Trapp.*

Hannah asserts that supreme sovereignty of God, of which the boasting, arrogant spirit, whether found in Peninnah's pride of fecundity, or in Sennacherib's pride of conquest, or in Nebuchadnezzar's pride of empire, or in Antichrist's pride of rebellion, is a blasphemous denial.—*Biblical Commentary.*

The word *sheol* signifieth—(1) The grave, the place of dead bodies; (2) by a metaphor, a state of adversity in this world; (3) the forlorn estate of those who are deprived of God's favour and inward comfort, whether for a time and when they are utterly cast off.—*Willet.*

The Lord bringeth down to the grave by the terror which He awakens in the soul of justly merited punishment, and He bringeth up by humble faith that He grants in His infinite mercy and in the merits of the blood of His Son.—*De Sacy.*

Ver. 8. These words contain the reason of all that precedes in the five foregoing verses: for the very earth being founded, upheld, and supported by the Lord, no wonder that all the inhabiters of it are in His power, to dispose of them as He thinks good.—*Patrick.*

The plans of the Most High are very different from men's expectations. In order to execute them He rejects the great. While He allowed kings upon the throne to ignore His greatest miracle, He drew from the dust twelve disciples, and made them the masters of the nations, the judges of the world, the instruments of the greatest event which has ever taken place, the pillars of His Church, and partakers of His eternal empire. And He takes from the obscurity of a peasant's home a poor, unknown girl, and makes her the mother of the Highest.—*Duguet.*

Ver. 9. This is a lower love and courtesy than to keep their hands (John xiii. 5, 6). He keepeth them from utter prolapsion, from devoratory evils, as Tertullian saith, so as that either they fall not at all—stumble they may, but they get ground by their stumbling—or if they fall, they shall arise; for the Lord putteth under His hand (Psa. xxxvii. 24). There is still a supporting grace, below which they cannot possibly fall. . . . . Augustine, striving against his headstrong corruptions in his own strength, heard a voice saying, "Thou would'st stand by thyself, and therefore fallest."—*Trapp.*

As Jehovah, the God of Israel, the Holy One governs the world with His almighty power, the righteous have nothing to fear. But the wicked will perish in darkness—*i. e.*, in adversity, when God withdraws the light of His grace, so that they fall into distress and calamity. For no man can be strong through his own power so as to meet the storms of life.—*Keil.*

God keeps the feet of His people. 1. *By the prevention of sinful and evil occasions*, so in that He does not so easily suffer them to come within the compass of ruin and spiritual destruction. 2. *By fortifying and strengthening the heart and mind against closing with them*, so that though occasions be administered, yet they shall have no power or efficacy upon them. He does this both by the grace of *fear* and by the grace of *faith*. God, by stirring up in His servants a holy tenderness and jealousy over themselves, does by this means very much scare them, who, by fearing lest they should sin, do come to avoid sinning itself. And faith is another supporter likewise. It lays hold upon all the promises of assistance and strengthening which God has made to His servants, such as this now here in the text, therefore it is said, "We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Pet. i. 5). By the power of God as the *principal*. And by faith as the *instrumental*. We may likewise take the words in reference to *temporal* things. 1. God will bless His saints in their *ways*, not only for the preserving of their souls from sin, but the

preserving of their bodies from destruction. He that will keep the *feet* certainly will not be wanting to the breast and head. He names the feet, that from them we might rise higher to all the rest. 2. He will bless them in regard to their *works*. There is a blessing upon a righteous hand whatsoever it be that he undertakes. As a blessing of *protection* upon his person, so a blessing of *success* upon his labour and constant employment. . . . . As there is a difference between the wicked and the godly, in regard of their *disposition*, so is there likewise in regard of their *condition*. 1. It is a state of *darkness*. (*a*). In the ignorance of their minds. (*b*). In the inordinancy of their affections—malice shades the mind, and so any other unruly passion. (*c*). In the practice of all other sins whatsoever, forasmuch as they seek the dark for the commission of them. (*d*). In that spiritual blindness to which they are delivered and given up. This is the darkness of the *way*, there is also the darkness of the *end*—the darkness of *death*, which is common to all, and the darkness of *judgment*. 2. It is a state of *silence*. (*a*). Grief, horror, and perplexity shall seize upon them. Silence is an attendant upon grief and astonishment in their extremities. (*b*). It is a note of conviction, they shall have nothing to say for themselves. (*c*). It is a note of abode and continuance. It does denote the immovableness and irrecoverableness of their miserable condition.—*Horton.*

The title, saints, is of all names the most honourable. It literally signifies the *holy ones*. It associates the servant of God with his Maker, "whose name is holy," with his Redeemer, "the Holy One of Israel," and with "the Holy Ghost," not to mention those holy ones who veil their faces before His throne. —*Jowett.*

Ver. 10. Here Hannah casts a prophetic glance at the consummation of the kingdom of God. As certainly as the Lord God keeps the righteous at all times, and casts down the wicked, so certainly will He judge the whole world, to hurl down all His foes and perfect His kingdom which He has founded in Israel. And as every kingdom culminates in its throne, or in the full might and government of a king, so the kingdom of God can only attain its full perfection in the king whom the Lord will give to His people and endow with His might. The *Anointed of the Lord*, of whom Hannah prophesies in the spirit, is not one single king of Israel, either David or Christ, but an ideal king, though not a mere personification of the throne about to be established, but the actual king whom Israel received in David and his race, which culminated in the Messiah. The exaltation of the horn of the Anointed of Jehovah commenced with the victorious and splendid expansion of the power of David, was repeated with every victory over the enemies of God and His kingdom gained by the successive kings of David's house, goes on in the advancing spread of the kingdom of Christ, and will eventually attain to its eternal consummation in the judgment of the last day, through which all the enemies of Christ will be made His footstool.—*Keil.*

Hannah's devout acknowledgment that God only is the Rock, and that it is the sole prerogative of God to raise up princes and to give them strength, stands in striking contrast to the people of Israel, who impatiently asked for a king to judge them *like the nations*, and to go out before them, and to *fight their battles* (chap. viii. 5–20), instead of waiting patiently God's time, and instead of rejoicing in their privilege in *not* being like the nations, but in being the special people of God, and instead of relying upon His Almighty arm to save them from their enemies. She is the first who addresses God as the "Lord of Hosts" (see chap. i. 11), a title which emphatically declares the sovereignty of the Unseen Ruler of the world; and in this also, by her faith in Him, she stands in contrast with the faithless impatience of the people of Israel who asked Samuel to make them a visible head. The king of whom Hannah prophesies

is "*His* king," a king by whom the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth, not the king craved by the *people* on mere *worldly* considerations, but the King to be appointed by God, in His own time, and a figure of Christ of whom Jehovah speaks by David (Psa. ii. 6; lxxii. 1) to whom all judgment is given, and who will put all enemies under His feet (John v. 22–27; 1 Cor. xv. 25–28).—*Wordsworth.*

The judgment of God's primitive justice. 1. *Whom it threatens*—the ungodly, "adversaries." 2. How God makes it approach with *warning signs*, "out of heaven shall He thunder." 3. How it *discharges itself* against all the *world* that is opposed to God. "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth." 4. How it *promotes the perfecting of His kingdom.* "He shall give strength unto His king."—*Lange's Commentary.*

Vers. 1–10. The *Magnificat* of Hannah is an evangelical song, chanted by the spirit of prophecy under the Levitical Law. It is a prelude and overture to the Gospel. It is a connection of sweet and sacred melody between the Magnificat of Miriam after the passage of the Red Sea—symbolising the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ,—and the Magnificat of Mary after the annunciation of His birth. Let this song of Hannah be read in the Septuagint, and then the Magnificat in St. Luke's original, and the connection of the two will be more clearly recognised. . . . The true characteristic of sacred poetry is that it is not egotistical. It merges the individual in the nation and in the Church universal. It looks forward from the special occasion that prompts the utterance of thanksgiving, and extends and expands itself, with a loving power and holy energy, into a large and sympathetic outburst of praise to God for His love to all mankind in Christ. . . . . The Magnificat of Hannah is conceived in this spirit. It is not only a song of thanksgiving, it is also a *prophecy.* It is an utterance of the Holy Ghost moving within her, and making her maternal joy on the birth of Samuel to overflow in outpourings of thankfulness to God for those greater blessings in Christ, of which that birth was an earnest and a pledge. In this respect it may be compared to the Song of Moses (Deut. xxxii.) and the Song of David (2 Sam. xxii.)—*Wordsworth.*

The history leaves us no room to doubt that the immediate occasion of this song was the birth of Samuel; yet, if viewed in reference to this occasion alone, how comparatively trifling is the theme! How strained and magniloquent the expressions! Hannah speaks of her "mouth being enlarged over her enemies," of "the bows of the mighty men being broken," of "the barren bearing seven," of "the full hiring themselves for bread," and other things of a like nature,—all how far exceeding, and we might even say caricaturing the occasion, if it has respect merely to the fact of a woman, hitherto reputed barren, becoming at length the joyful mother of a child. Were the song an example of the inflated style not uncommon in Eastern poetry, we might not be greatly startled at such grotesque exaggerations; but being a portion of that Word which is all given by inspiration of God, and is as silver tried in a furnace, we must banish from our mind any idea of extravagance and conceit. Indeed, from the whole strain and character of the song, it is evident that, though occasioned by the birth of Samuel, it was so far from having exclusive reference to that event, that the things concerning it formed one only of a numerous and important class pervading the providence of God, and closely connected with His highest purposes. In a spiritual respect it was a time of mournful barrenness and desolation in Israel: "the word of the Lord was precious, there was no open vision," and iniquity was so rampant as even to be lifting up its insolent front, and practising its foul abominations in the very precincts of the sanctuary. How natural, then, for Hannah, when she had got that child of desire and hope, which she had devoted from his birth as a Nazarite to

the Lord's service, and feeling her soul moved by a prophetic impulse to regard herself as specially raised up to be "a sign and a wonder" in Israel, and to do so particularly in respect to that principle in the Divine government which had so strikingly developed itself in her experience, but which was destined to receive its grandest manifestation in the work and kingdom which were to be more peculiarly the Lord's. Hence, instead of looking exclusively at her individual case, and marking the operation of the Lord's hand in what simply concerned her personal history, she wings her flight aloft, and takes a comprehensive survey of the general scheme of God; noting especially, as she proceeds, the workings of that pure and gracious sovereignty which delights to exalt a humble piety, while it pours contempt on the proud and rebellious. And as every exercise of this principle is but part of a grand series which culminates in the dispensation of Christ, her song runs out at the close into the sublime and glowing delineation of the final results to be achieved by it in connection with His righteous administration. This song, then, plainly consists of two parts, in the one of which only—the concluding portion—it is properly prophetical. The preceding stanzas are taken up with unfolding from past and current events, the grand spiritual idea; the closing ones carry it forward in beautiful and striking application to the affairs of Messiah's kingdom.—*Fairbairn.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—17.

The Sin of Eli's Sons.

I. Natural birth is not a qualification for spiritual service. It does seem to fit men for some professions. The sons of sailors and soldiers often seem to be born with tendencies towards the profession of their forefathers, and very early give proof that they are intended by nature to enter a service which only requires natural gifts for its right fulfilment. But men do not inherit qualifications which fit them to be moral leaders and spiritual guides. It is not enough to possess the natural gifts which belong to holy progenitors, another and a higher law must be brought to exert its influence upon a man's heart before he is fit to succeed his parent in spiritual service. If he succeeds to his father's position merely because he is his son, it is a transgression of the law of God's kingdom and must end in evil. If birth and blood and time-honoured custom could qualify men for a moral service, then Eli's sons would have been fully fitted to succeed their father. They were born to a good social position—no man in the kingdom stood higher than Eli. They belonged to a family peculiarly honoured by God—no human being ever held a higher spiritual position than the High-priest of Israel. They could trace back their relationship to Moses, that man of God, whose name had for generations justly held the highest place in the history of his nation and was destined to become one of the most honoured in the kingdom of God. They were in this respect "Hebrews of the Hebrews"—members of its most honoured family—born representatives of the nation of which God was, in a special sense, the invisible king. Yet they were utterly unfit for their important office. They "knew not the Lord" and therefore they were His enemies although they were Eli's sons.

II. When men thus throw away all the advantages of birth and education, they generally become sinners of a double dye. Although godliness does not come by inheritance there is everything in a pious ancestry to favour its growth. The swimmer who finds himself in the stream with both wind and tide in his favour to second his efforts, is doubly to blame if he neglects to use his advantages, and dies by his own deliberate choice if he throws away the opportunity

he had of gaining the shore. Though time and tide waited not *for* him, yet they waited *upon* him, and he is verily guilty if he refused to take advantage of them. Some are born into this world to find themselves surrounded with social and spiritual influences which, like favourable winds and tides, wait to make the road to godliness easy to them. If they neglect to avail themselves of these good gifts of God they must become sinners of the blackest type, for they harden their hearts against the most softening influence, they sin against light and knowledge. Thus did the sons of Eli. They were launched into life upon a stream whose current was flowing towards that which was pure and holy—they were surrounded by influences which tended to make them worthy to be priests of the Most High God and true sons of Abraham. But they cast them all aside, and not only did not become spiritually fit for their service, but grew into monsters of iniquity, and turned the very tabernacle of God into a home of the grossest sin.

III. No bond arising from social position or rank is strong enough to prevent the manifestation of the sin which is in the heart. A tree may at present seem to be in a healthy condition, but if there is that in the root beneath the ground that is enough to kill the tree, nothing can prevent the fact from becoming evident in that part of the tree which is above the surface. Leaves and branches will, bye-and-bye, tell the tale. Nature is a symbol, and an expounder of moral truth in this matter as in many others. There is nothing morally bad that is hidden in a man's heart that will not manifest itself in his life, though his reputation and his rank call upon him to conceal it. The secret sin will ere long become too strong to continue secret, although loss of position and influence may be the result of its being made public. Social prestige is a garment too narrow to conceal from view the hidden man of the heart, however desirable it may be to do so. If the tree is corrupt, the fruit will be corrupt also (Matt. xii. 33). Eli's sons had every temporal advantage to gain from preserving an outward decency of conduct—they must have been fully aware that only by so doing could they command in any degree the respect which was usually accorded to men in their position. But sin in the human heart is like pent-up water, which after being held back for a time rushes forth with a force that breaks down every dam, and sweeps away every obstacle, and carries desolation wherever it goes. Even the restraint of the office of the priesthood was not strong enough to hold back Hophni and Phinehas from the grossest crimes, and their lust and greed broke down every social barrier, and spread moral desolation all around them.

IV. Those who are both irreverent and licentious poison human nature in its highest and lowest relations. The sin of licentiousness is a sin against the animal part of man; it defiles his body, and causes the race to degenerate physically. It makes all animal ties, which are intended to bring blessings to men, sink below those of the brute creation. The Lord is for the body (1 Cor. vi. 13), and He has proved that He cares for man's physical well-being by the strictness with which He has fenced him round in this respect. He who transgresses God's laws in this matter poisons the source of man's physical well-being, and degrades his nature below the lowest animal. A river, while it flows within its appointed channel, carries fertility and beauty wherever it goes, but when it bursts its banks it obliterates all the beauty of the landscape, and spreads destruction all around. So with men's animal passions. While they keep within the limits prescribed for them they are instruments of enjoyment and of blessing, but when the boundary is broken down and they flow beyond their lawful channel, they leave nothing but a curse behind them. Eli's sons were guilty of thus defiling the body, and by so doing they poisoned one of the ordained streams of social blessing in their own families and in that of many

others in Israel. They were also guilty of the grossest irreverence, and in this they sinned against man's higher nature. Their conduct tended to dislodge from the mind all conceptions of the holiness and purity of God. This they did by the *place* in which they committed their most open crimes. The hospital is the place where men hope to receive healing medicine. If those who are expected to dispense remedies give poisonous drugs instead of healing, where shall the sick turn for help? The house of God is the place where men ought to find that which will conduce to moral health. If there they find only moral corruption, where shall they look? What higher crime can men be guilty of than that of turning the house of spiritual healing into a moral pest-house. Of what greater act of irreverence could the sons of Eli have been guilty than that whereby they corrupted the chastity of the women who frequented the tabernacle? They also tended to lower men's conception of God by profaning His *service*. If a man constantly takes the name of God upon his lips in a light and careless manner he educates those about him to think lightly of the Divine Being. This is a tribute that a child of the wicked one is expected to pay to his father the devil, that thereby the name of the holy God may be lightly esteemed in the world. But if profanity of *speech* tends to dishonour God in the minds of men, much more does profanity of *action*. The sons of Eli were profane doers, and were therefore profane in a manner more calculated to produce irreverence in others than men of profane speech merely. They took God's name in vain in their actions, and despised the holy name by which they were called by despising the offerings which were made to God according to His appointment. By open disobedience to God's plain command, by robbing the Lord, and by robbing those who came to worship Him, those whose special function it was to hallow Him before the nation caused His offering to be *abhorred*. It is treason to speak or act against the king in any part of his dominion, but to defy him in his throne-room would surely be the most aggravated form of the crime. The whole earth is the Lord's, and to act with irreverence towards Him in any part of His dominion is a sin, but to profane His holy ordinances in the palace of the Great King, is a sin of the blackest hue. The body-guard of a monarch is especially bound to render him loyal and faithful service; if it betray its trust, where is he to look for faithful servants? God's ministers in all ages are the body-guard of the Eternal King; if they prove themselves renegades and unworthy of the high honour that He has put upon them, others will find in their unfaithfulness a licence to set Him at defiance. (For a parallel case in the modern history of the Church, see Froude's "Annals of an English Abbey." "Short Studies," vol. iii).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 12. So were Jehoshua the high-priest's sons (Ezra x. 18). Their parents, much employed about other things, are oft not so careful of well-breeding their children; and besides, they are apt to abuse their father's authority and power to a licentious practice. Eli brought up his sons to bring down his house. *They knew not the Lord. Apprehensively* they knew Him, but not *affectively;* they had no lively light, their knowledge was not accompanied with faith and fear of God (Rom. i. 21; Titus i. 16).—*Trapp.*

If the conveyance of grace were natural, holy parents would not be so ill suited with children. . . . . If virtue were as well entailed on us as sin, one might serve to check the other in our children; but now, since grace is derived from heaven on whomsoever it pleaseth the Giver, and that evil, which ours receive hereditarily

from us, is multiplied by their own corruption, it can be no wonder that good men have ill children; it is rather a wonder that any children are not evil. . . . If our children be good, let us thank God for it; this was more than we could give them; if evil, they may thank us and themselves, us for their birth sin, themselves for the improvement of it to that height of wickedness.—*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 15. God may well call for the best of the best; but these liquorish Lurcos would needs be served before Him and be their own carvers. Boiled meat would not content them. But it ill becometh a servant of the Lord to be a slave to his palate. Christ biddeth His apostles, when they come into a house, "eat such things as are set before them."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 17. It hath been an old saying, *De templo omne bonum, de templo omne malum*—all good or evil comes from the temple.—*Chrysostom.* Where the pastor is good, and the people good, he may say to them, as Paul to his Corinthians, "Are ye not my work in the Lord?" (1 Cor. ix. 1) Where the pastor is bad, and the people no better, they may say to him, Art thou not our destruction in the world? It is no wonder if an abused temple makes a disordered people. A wicked priest is the worst creature upon God's earth; no sin is so black as that shall appear from under a white surplice. Every man's iniquity is so much the heinouser as his place is holier. The sin of the clergy is like a rheum, which, rising from the stomach into the head, drops down upon the lungs, fretting the most noble and vital parts, till all the members languish into corruption. The lewd sons of Eli were so much the less tolerable by sinning in the tabernacle. Their sacrifices might do away the sins of others; no sacrifice could do away their own, Many a soul was the cleaner for the blood of those beasts they shed; their own souls were the fouler by it. By one and the same service they did expiate the people's offences and multiply their own. Our clergy is no charter for heaven. Such men are like the conveyances of land: evidences and instruments to settle others in the kingdom of heaven, while themselves have no part of that they convey. It is no impossible thing for men at once to show the way to heaven with their tongue, and lead the way to hell with their foot. It was not a Jewish ephod, it is not a Romish cowl that can privilege an evil-doer from punishment. Therefore it was God's charge to the executioners of His judgment, "Begin at mine own sanctuary" (Ezek. ix. 6); and the apostle tells us that "judgment shall begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. iv. 17); and Christ, entering into His prophetical office, began reformation at His Father's house (John ii. 15). Let our devout and holy behaviour prevent this, and by our reverent carriage in the temple of God let us honour the God of the temple. . . . . If Christ, while he was upon the cross, saith Bernard, had given me some drops of His own blood in a vial, how carefully would I have kept them, how dearly esteemed them, how laid them next my heart. But now He did not think it fit to trust me with those drops, but He hath entrusted to me a flock of His lambs, those souls for whom He shed His blood, like whom His own blood was not so dear unto Him; upon these let me spend my care, my love, my labour, that I may present them holy saints to my dear Lord Jesus. But let Christians beware, lest, for the abuses of men they despise the temple of God. For as the altar cannot sanctify the priest, so neither can the unholiness of the priest disallow the altar. His sin is his own, and cannot make you guilty; the virtue and comfort is from God, and this is still able to make you holy. When we read that "the sin of the priests was great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord," this, we all confess, was ill done of the priests, and I hope no man thinks it was well done of the people. Shall men, therefore, scorn the sanctuary, and cast that contempt on the service

of God which belongs to the vices of men? This were to add our own evil to the evil of others, and to offend God because He was offended. Cannot the faults of men displease us, but we must needs fall out with God? . . . . We say of the sacraments themselves, much more of the ministers—These do not give us what God doth give us by them.—*T. Adams.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Vers. 18-21, and 26.

True Ministry.

I. Qualification for the service of God is not always on the side of years. A child may have a more correct idea of how to serve God than a man. The son may possess knowledge on this matter of which his parents may be profoundly ignorant. This is true of other knowledge than spiritual. One who is very young in years may far surpass his elders in his aptitude for science or art. The youthful Watt had thoughts suggested to his mind by the phenomena of nature such as had never occurred to the ancients who had preceded him, and he was thus at a very early age more qualified to serve his generation in this department of knowledge than they were. So in spiritual service. Age and experience do not necessarily qualify men to minister acceptably before the Lord. Hophni and Phinehas were old enough to serve God acceptably in the priest's office, but while they brought dishonour upon Him in the performance of the most sacred functions, the child Samuel so performed his more humble duties as to make them an acceptable service to Jehovah. It is not the office which is held, but the spirit in which its duties are performed, that constitutes the real service, and that depends not on *years*, but on *character*, and often those who have been long nominal or even real servants of God are outstripped in fervour and devotion by those who have entered the lists many years later. "Many that are first shall be last, and the last first" (Matt. xix. 30). Many who take the lead in the first start of the race are left far behind when others have reached the goal. Some who enter a school long before others are overtaken and outstripped by the later comers. And it is so in the Church of God. The sons of Eli were in the priesthood before Samuel was in the world, yet he was far in advance of them in the possession of that "reverence and godly fear," without which no service to God is acceptable (Heb. xii. 28).

II. When *re*generation has begun in the young and *de*generation has set in in those of mature years, the progress is commonly rapid in both. While Samuel "grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men," Hophni and Phinehas hastened to fill up the measure of their iniquity. The sinful human nature which is the inheritance of all men was common both to Samuel and the sons of Eli, and they were both surrounded with influences favourable to the overcoming of evil tendencies and to the formation of a holy character. But Hophni and Phinehas strengthened every sinful natural disposition by giving themselves up to be ruled by their passions, by utterly disregarding the commandment of the Lord, the voice of conscience, or even their own reputation. Such an entire disregard of all the restraints which God had placed upon them made rapid degeneration inevitable, and they soon became as bad as it was possible for fallen men to become. But Samuel's upward growth was as rapid as their descent. He had evidently already become a subject of the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, he had yielded himself up to that Divine guidance which is powerful enough to renew the human heart and to give a new birth unto holiness, and so to make the path of him who is willing to be moulded by it "as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the

perfect day." The child grew and so did the men. The one ripened for a noble and holy and useful life, the others for the condemnation and judgment of God.

III. The most godless and the holy may be found associated in the external service of God. Samuel and the sons of Eli were both engaged in the temple service. Samuel was "girded with a linen ephod," and so, doubtless, were they. Wheat and tares grow together in the same field. John and Judas sat at meat together with the Lord. A saint of the highest type may be associated in external religious service with a most villanous man, they may worship in the same house of God, may sit together at the table of the Lord. It must and will be so until the harvest when the Lord of the field will say to the reapers, "*Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn*" (Matt. xiii. 30).

IV. Fulfilled obligations will not discharge us from obligations yet to be fulfilled. Hannah had taken her child and given him to Eli for the service of the Lord, but her loving care of him did not end there. Her heart was still with him, and her hands still busy for him. She "made him a little coat, which she brought to him from year to year." The performance of past duties to God does not free us from the obligations of the present any more than debts discharged in the past will release us from those we may contract in the future. Not even a very special work done for God, or a great sacrifice made for His service in the past, will discharge us from the obligation to perform the commonest duties of to-day. When Hannah had performed her vow, and dedicated her first-born son to the Lord, and under the influence of the Holy Ghost had sung of the coming kingdom of righteousness and of the Lord's Anointed, she still regarded it as her privilege and duty to care for her child's every-day bodily wants, and to make his garment with her own hands. She recognised the fact that if the spirit is to serve God in the present life the body must be cared for too, even as did the great Apostle of the Gentiles when, looking forward to being shortly crowned by his Lord in Paradise, he sent for his "cloak which he left in Troas," that so long as he was in the flesh he might keep his body from cold and sickness, and so continue fit to serve His Master until the end should come (2 Tim. iv. 13). Those whose hearts are right will not despise the lowliest or the most ordinary work, or call anything that their hands find to do common or unworthy of their notice.

V. We have here a record of Divine compensation for human sacrifice. "The Lord blessed Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters." The kingdom of nature demands sacrifices of men. The husbandman must cast away some seed and give it up as it were to death, and he must do this without regard to the wind or the cold. But Nature is generous when she finds that her conditions are fulfilled, she gives an ear for a single grain, and the joy of harvest to compensate for the toil of the sowing-time. And as it is in God's natural kingdom, so is it more abundantly in His spiritual kingdom. No service rendered to Him, not "even a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple," shall lose its reward. Hannah gave her firstborn son to the Lord in the service of the temple, and her home was gladdened by five more children. She found that God heaped into her bosom "good measure" and "running over." In the more spiritual dispensation of the New Testament men must not look for, nor do spiritual men desire such a repayment in the same kind, but God will be no man's debtor, and the word of Christ is sure: "*And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life*" (Matt. xix. 29).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 18. Samuel did not merely worship and enjoy spiritual training; he ministered before the Lord, and did what he could to make himself useful. "Perhaps," says Matthew Henry, "he attended immediately on Eli's person—was ready to him to fetch and bring as he had occasion; and that is called ministering to the Lord. . . . . He could light a candle, or hold a dish, or run on an errand, or shut a door; and because he did this with a pious disposition of mind, it is called *ministering to the Lord*, and great notice is taken of it." We have not now a tabernacle such as there was in Shiloh, nor have we such services as Samuel was called upon to render; but in the Church of God there is sphere wide enough for the most active energy, diversified enough for many workers, and simple enough for the youngest to undertake . . . . Common obedience and everyday life, too, receive a consecration from the godly motive. Children, by their infant prayers, have ere now awakened a parent's long silent heart. . . . An infant's hymn has awakened the hardened, and the example of a believing boy has occasioned an older mind to inquire, "What must I do to be saved?"—*Steel.*

Ver. 19. This was much in Samuel's education. It nurtured the family feeling, the loss of which is a great deprivation. It kept his heart tender, when amidst strangers his feelings might be blunted. It provided for him that he might not be reproached. —*Steel.*

"Petty little histories!" cries Unbelief. "What matters it whether one knows that Samuel had a little coat or no?" Holy Scripture is not written for the wise, but for child-souls, and a child-like soul does not doubt that even the little coat which Hannah prepared for her Samuel has its history. If I think of Hannah as every year sewing this coat at her home in Ramah, I know that at every stitch a prayer for her Samuel rose up to the throne of the Lord. The coat which she was sewing would remind her that she had given him to the Lord; and when the coat was ready, and she brought it to Shiloh, then every time with the coat she anew gave Samuel to her God, and said, "I give him to the Lord again for his whole life, because he was obtained from the Lord by prayer."—*Daechsel.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Vers. 22-25.

Eli's Reproof of his Sons.

I. Impartiality is an essential qualification in a judge or ruler. Some sins against Divine laws are to be dealt with by human rulers. Magistracy is an ordination of God, and in proportion as the character of him who administers the law is good, and the law itself is just, human judges are reflections of God, and represent Him who will not acquit the guilty, and will defend the innocent. But, above all things, he who holds such an office must be impartial. Eli, as the judge of Israel, was bound to imitate God in this particular, as in all others. No man can be honoured by his fellow-creatures unless he deals out evenhanded justice to all to whom he administers law, and the man who will allow rank, or position, or relationship to influence his judgment is no representative of Him who will render to all their dues. A man should be specially guarded when called upon to pass sentence or administer justice to one who is connected with him by the ties of blood or friendship. Such a medium has a tendency to distort our sense of right and wrong—to lead us to excuse the crime with which we should deal severely in a stranger. What we should look

upon as pure villany in the one we may be disposed to regard as mere misfortune in the other. It needs a much higher standard of character than that possessed by Eli to deal out the rightful measure of punishment to those who are nearly connected with us. The goodness and integrity of God leads Him to adopt a course directly opposite to that which men generally pursue in such a case. He punishes with greater rigour in proportion as the offender has been hitherto favoured and brought into near relation to Him. We have reason to believe that few of the sons of God stood nearer the Eternal throne than Satan. And because it was so, his punishment has been severe in proportion, the hell into which he was banished was deep in proportion to the place in heaven from which he fell. No people of ancient days stood in such near and intimate relation to God as did the people of Israel. Yet for this very reason no nation has received such severe punishment for transgression. "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*" (Amos iii. 2). God, being the perfectly righteous judge and governor, is the Being whose example should be followed by all human magistrates, and the prominent feature in God's magistracy is His strict impartiality. If Eli had imitated God in this respect he would have dealt very differently with his abandoned sons. But he looked at their crimes through the medium of his fatherly relationship, and this medium so softened down the blood-red stains upon their characters that when, as the first magistrate of Israel, he ought to have sentenced them to death or at least to have excommunicated them from office, he contents himself with a very tame remonstrance. He touches them gently with the back of the sword, whereas if a Moses or such a man as the first Phinehas had been in his place, he would have thrust the blade into them up to the very hilt (Num. xxv. 6–11). His stern rebuke of Hannah for a fancied crime shows that he could be severe, in speech at least, upon occasions, and the contrast even in the words used to the unoffending woman and those in which he reproved his sons, makes him stand convicted of gross impartiality, and therefore as lacking the most essential qualification of a magistrate.

II. Men who are merely emotional are fit neither to govern men nor to train children. Honey is good for man's eating, and contains some nutriment and also healing properties. But honey alone would be a poor sustainer or nourisher of human life. Wax is a useful material for some purposes, but it would be poor material of which to build a house. To feed upon the first would be to make sickness certain; to build with the second would be to ensure the fall of the house. Emotions have their place in the human soul, and a man destitute of feeling is a monster; but feelings are not to be the guide of human conduct, and the judge or the father who is swayed entirely by his emotions will in time forfeit all respect and confidence. Tenderness and gentleness are blessed and Divine attributes of character, but mere softness and inertness must not be mistaken for them; and where they really exist there is no lack of capability for righteous indignation, no want of will to administer deserved rebuke. Eli's failure in his duty as a judge leads us to infer that he had been a too indulgent father—that which unfitted him to deal justly with his grown sons would have unfitted him to train them in childhood. Contrast the tender and long-suffering Son of God with the soft-hearted Eli, and place the reproof of the high priest side by side with our Lord's denunciations of similar characters holding a like position, and we see how the tenderest compassion is compatible with the most terrible denunciation of sin. "*Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . . . Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*" etc.—(Matt. xxiii. 23–35).

III. There are sins beyond the power of human intercession. Even Eli

allowed this (ver. 25). Men have committed and do commit certain sins, and other men have interceded and do intercede for them and obtain their pardon. This is the case where sins are committed against other men, and sometimes when sin is committed against God. God Himself has accepted human mediation, and has held back His judgments. This He did often in the case of Moses and the people of Israel. Many a time He spared the sinful nation because the voice of His servant pleaded for them. But sometimes no intercession of man can avert Divine displeasure—no human creature can prevent the thunderbolt of God's judgment from falling. Noah, Daniel, and Job were men who were highly esteemed by God, and whose prayers on behalf of others are —in the case of two at least—known to have been effectual (Job xlii. 8; Dan. ix. 20, 23). But, if they had all lived in the days of Ezekiel, their joint intercessions could not have saved the guilty Israelites from the chastisement which their sins had made inevitable—"*Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God*" (Ezek. xiv. 14). The sins of Hophni and Phinehas were so outrageously vile, and their position and office so aggravated their crimes that they were beyond the power of human intercession. No prayer of Eli, not even the prayers of a Noah, a Daniel, or a Job, could now have turned away the judgment of God from them. The father seems to feel that he cannot ask forgiveness for them in their present state of heart—he exhibits some conception of the enormity of their crimes when he says, "If a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" It was his right and privilege to draw nigh to God on behalf of others, but the iniquity of his sons was so great, that his very position as high-priest forbade his pleading that God would pass over their sins.

IV. When sinners are beyond the reach of intercession and marked for Divine punishment, they will not repent. The people of Sodom were in such a condition. Intercession for them could not avail, because they were so hardened in sin that repentance had become a moral impossibility. Even after God had stricken them with blindness they persisted in endeavouring to perpetrate their enormous wickedness, thus proving that neither the persuasions of men, nor the judgments of God, could lead them to repentance. Eli's sons were as great sinners, for if their crimes were not quite so black, they were committed against Divine light and holy influences such as were not possessed by the men of Sodom. Where could stronger inducements to repentance be found than those which they had set at nought? How could men be led to repentance who turned the very house of God into a house of shameless crime? Before the executioner brings the sharp steel to the neck, he blindfolds the culprit. These men had blindfolded themselves by their persistent iniquity, and nothing now could prevent God's axe from falling.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 23. Had these men but some little slackened their duty, or heedlessly omitted some rite of the sacrifice, this censure had not been unfit; but to punish the thefts, rapines, sacrileges, adulteries, incests of his sons with "Why do ye so," was no other than to shave the head which had deserved cutting off. . . . An easy rebuke doth but encourage wickedness, and makes it think itself so slight as that censure importeth. A vehement rebuke to a capital evil is but like a strong shower to a ripe field, which lays that corn which were worthy of a sickle. It is a breach of justice not to proportionate the punishment to the offence: to whip a man for murder, or to punish the purse for incest, or to burn treason in the hand, or to award the stocks to burglary, is to patronise evil instead of avenging it.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver 24. Too mild all along. He should have said as Isa. lvii. 3, 4, "Draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress," etc., ye degenerate brood and sons of Belial and not of Eli. . . . He should have said, "Woe is me that I live to hear it; it had been better that I had died long since, or that you had been buried alive, than thus to live to stink above ground." But he saith only, "I hear ill of you by all the people," as if he went only upon hearsay, and were put on by the people thus to check them.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 25. The duties which men are required to perform in society are twofold, they owe duties to their brethren, they owe duties to God; or rather, considered in a Christian light, every one of our social duties, as it should be performed on a religious principle, so should it be considered of a religious character. "Whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God." The mind of man, however, is so gross that it is necessary for the sanctions of religion to be seconded by the authority of human laws in enforcing the observance of our social and moral duties. Not only, therefore, is the wrath of God denounced against the sinner for his offences, every one of which is a violation of God's authority, but "if a man sin against another, the judge also judges him"—he is amenable also to that human authority which he has despised. Still, after all that can be done by man's interference, after all the severity of punishment which men can inflict upon the offender to deter others from a like offence, it is the anger of God which is most to be avoided, it is the punishment of God which is most to be dreaded. Comparatively trifling should be our fear of them "which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul;" for comparatively feeble is their vengeance, and comparatively light and transitory is the punishment which they can inflict; but our fear of the Divine wrath should, if possible, be great in proportion to the greatness of the power of Him "who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." — *Bishop Mant.*

I read not in the Scripture of a hypocrite's conversion, and what wonder? For whereas after sin conversion is left as a means to cover all other sins, what means to recover him who hath converted conversion itself into a sin?—*Trapp.*

"The Lord would slay them!" It is a dreadful sentence, and we would fain know of whom it was uttered. It is spoken of particular persons and not generally. . . . of the sons of a priest, brought up amidst holy things from their childhood. . . . What more could have been done unto the vineyard? What greater means of knowledge, what better opportunities of being impressed with a sense of God's majesty and holiness could possibly have been granted them? But these means and opportunities had been neglected, till what was food at first was now their poison. They had gained such a habit of seeing and hearing holy things unmoved that nothing could possibly work on them. It is probable that every fresh service which they performed about the tabernacle did but harden them more and more. How, then, could they hearken to the voice of their father, a kind old man indeed, and a good one, but one with none of that vigour of character which commands respect, even from the evil. Were his words of gentle rebuke likely to move those hearts which for years had served every day in the presence of God, and had felt neither fear for Him nor love of Him. Vain was it to hope that such hearts should be so renewed to repentance. The seal of destruction was set on them but too plainly; the Lord would slay them; the laws of His providence, His unchanged and unchangable providence, had decreed that their case was hopeless; for they had hardened their hearts greedily all their lives, and their work was now set so sure that they could not undo it, because they could not now wish it to be undone.—*Dr. Arnold.*

The purpose of God was not the

cause of their disobedience, but their disobedience was a sign that they were now ripe for destruction, and that the righteous purposes of God in their case should now soon be executed.—*Starke.*

They were in a state of inner hardening, which excluded the subjective condition of salvation from destruction, and so they had already incurred God's unchangable condemnation. As hardened offenders they were already appointed by God to death; therefore the word of instruction had no moral effect upon them.—*Lange's Commentary.*

God is more honoured or dishonoured in our religious actions than in all the actions of our lives; in them we do directly pretend His honour and service, and therefore if we do not walk in them watchfully, and intend them seriously, the greater is our sin. For a trespass committed against holy things the Jews were to bring a ram, to be valued by the shekel, to the sanctuary; for a trespass against their brethren a ram was required, but no such valuation expressed; whence Origen infers: "It is one thing to sin in holy things, another thing to sin beside them." . . When men are some way off in a king's eye they will be comely in their carriage; but when they come into his presence-chamber to speak with him they will be most careful. . . . God is very curious how men carry themselves in His courts. . . . Do but observe, under the law, how choice He was about all things relating to His worship: the tabernacle must be made of the best wood, the purest gold, the finest linen, etc. . . . And what is the substance of all these shadows, but this, that God will be served by holy men, in the purest, holiest manner? . . . Dost thou not know that He "will be sanctified in them that draw nigh unto Him?" (Lev. x. 3). Great persons are impatient of contempts and affronts, especially when they are offered them in their own houses; God will sooner overlook thy forgetfulness of Him in thy trade or travels than in His tabernacle. When thou drawest nigh to Him there, He will be sanctified, either in thee or upon thee. If thou refuse to give Him glory in His service, believe it, He will get Himself glory by thy suffering. His worship is His face, and look for His fury if thou darest Him to His face.—*Swinnock.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 27.

A Divine Messenger.

I. This remarkable messenger was a nameless person. "There came a man of God unto Eli." All the prominent stars that stud our skies, and contribute their portion of light to the inhabitants of earth, are known to astronomers by name, but there are others that are so far off as not to admit of distinction, and we group them under some general designation: yet each one of these far-off bodies sheds some light upon us, nameless as it is. There are records in the holy Scriptures of many nameless persons, who, notwithstanding the little that is told about them, have been used by God to shed upon men the light of His truth. We group them together, like a cluster of far-off stars, under the general title of "men of God," and all we know of their individual character or history we gather from the message which they delivered, and which has been left upon record to shed a permanent light upon the world. But although we cannot tabulate and name all the myriad stars of heaven, those which are left unnamed by men are known by name to their Creator. "*He calleth them all by names*" (Isa. xl. 26). And so it is with those human light-givers whose names are not known to their fellow-men. Although this man of God remains unknown by name to all who read his words, yet he was and is known and named by His Divine Master, who called him to His work, and has long since rewarded him for it. And as those nameless stars may excel in magnitude

and glory many of those which, from their nearer position to us, seem to be stars of the first magnitude, so these unnamed prophets may be as great in God's kingdom, and may have done as great a work in His estimation as those whose names are left recorded upon the Divine page. And so it may be now with many a God-sent messenger, whose name is unknown to the world, or even to the Church—he may be more highly esteemed by Him whose name is above every name, and stand in much closer fellowship with Him than many a one whose name stands high in the estimation of his fellow-Christians. But, after all the general name includes the particular—the greater name includes all lesser names. "A man of God" includes all that can be said in honour of either Isaiah the prophet or Paul the apostle. For "a man of God," when the designation is not a misnomer, signifies—1. *A man who has got his character from God.* An Englishman when he is a true representation of his country and nation, has the disposition and tendencies which generally characterize his people. A child generally has some of the characteristics of his parent, because he is of his parent. So a man of God is one who possesses, in some degree, a God-like disposition, is one who is in sympathy with God, who loves what He loves, and hates what He hates. No particular name can express more concerning a man's relation to God than does this general one. "We are of God" (1 John iv. 6), is as much as can be said of any human creature, for these four words include all the blessedness of Divine sonship—all the glory of the life everlasting. 2. *In the Scripture, a man of God is one who bears a message from God.* This is a title given both to Old Testament prophets and to New Testament ministers. "But thou, O *man of God,* flee these things" (1 Tim. vi. 11). "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . . that the *man of God* may be perfected," etc. (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17). In both these passages the general name includes and means more than the particular. A "man of God" is more than Paul or Timothy—it is one who is entrusted with a message from the Eternal for his fellow-man—one who has "received" from God "the things which he speaks" (1 Cor. ii. 12, 13). He speaks to men of God and for God—his life-work is that of beseeching men to be "reconciled to God" (2 Cor. v. 20)—his one business in the world is to declare the "message" which he "has heard of Him," viz., that "*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*" (1 John i. 5).

II. **This messenger, though nameless, has been held in much greater honour by men than has the well-known house whose doom he declared.** Character is much more important than name, and the better the deed or the word the more easily we can dispense with the doer or the speaker. The names of Eli, of Hophni and Phinehas stand out prominently upon the page of Hebrew history, but what is recorded of the high-priest and judge himself is not calculated to set him very high in the estimation of men—he has left little more than his name behind him—while those of his sons are associated only with the memory of their crimes. The nameless prophet passes before us like a ship upon the horizon making for her destined port. We know not whence she came or whither she is going, but she leaves a pleasing impression upon the mind. But Eli and his sons remain like wrecks upon the shore, whose only use is to warn others to shun the rocks upon which they were broken.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—VERSES 27—36.

A Divine Message.

I. **The charge.** The house of Eli is charged with ingratitude. Perhaps no greater crime is chargeable upon human nature. The slave who has been freed

from the tyranny of a cruel master by the putting forth on his behalf of a strong arm, and who has not only been thus made a partaker of liberty but who has been clothed, and fed, and educated by the same benefactor, is expected to manifest gratitude to him to whom he owes all that makes life worth having. Gratitude ought to well up in his spirit like water from a living spring, and if such a man proves ungrateful it indicates that he is destitute of all right feeling, for he sins, not against law but against love. Eli's family, in common with all the other families of Israel, had dwelt in the "house of bondage." They had been for many years in "*the iron furnace, even in Egypt,*" and God had delivered them from their degraded condition and made them "*a people of inheritance unto Himself*" (Deut. iv. 20). To be ungrateful to such a deliverer shows them to be without natural feeling. But their ingratitude was aggravated by their elevation above all the other families of the nation. "*Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest?*" This is the head and front of their crime. When a number of homeless children are taken from the streets, and housed and cared for, those who rescue them have a claim upon the gratitude of all. But if out of this number, one is made the object of special care and is selected to fill a higher position than the rest, the ingratitude of this one will be so much greater than the ingratitude of the others, as the benefits bestowed upon the one have been greater than those bestowed upon the rest. Ingratitude in any would be a sin; but ingratitude in the one who has been especially favoured would be a sin of deeper die. The house of Aaron, of which Eli was a member, was bound to God by the common ties of gratitude by which all Israel was bound; but God had claims upon them which far exceeded those of any other family of the nation. The members of Aaron's family had been elected by God to the highest possible honour, they had been set apart to the most sacred office, and they had been sustained at the command of God by the offerings of the people. It was demanded of them in return that they should show their gratitude for such unparalleled favours by reverent obedience to God. But the conduct of those who now represented them was of the very opposite nature. There had been the blackest profanity instead of reverence, and those who ought to have been examples of holiness had been promoters of vice. Ingratitude has been called a monster in nature, and a comparison between the privileges enjoyod by those men, and the returns they made, convicts them of being guilty of this monstrous crime in an aggravated form.

II. The sentence. The authority and influence of Eli's house was to cease in Israel. That men by misdeeds entail a tendency to sin upon their posterity is a fact plainly written in the history of families and the oracles of God. A bad father generally leaves behind him bad children. This law must work unless God reconstitutes the present order of nature and makes each man's power to work good or ill to end with himself. But while there is the relationship of parent and child this cannot be. Wherever we look we find instances in which children are born to an inheritance of good or evil influences, and the after-life of the greater number takes its moral tone from the character of their parents. Hence it is that families as well as individuals merit the blessing or the punishment of God. Eli had not used his own authority and influence to much purpose, and his sons had shamefully abused that which had been entrusted to them by God. Such men were very unlikely to be the founders of a house which would be a blessing to Israel, therefore the sentence is directed not against Eli and his sons only, but against their posterity. As they had dishonoured God, so God would bring their house to dishonour. As Eli had not used his power and authority to prevent the defilement of the house of the Lord, he

shall have no power to hold back the desolation of his own. As he and his sons had not fulfilled the conditions laid down for the observance of the priests, their sons shall have no conditions to observe, for the priesthood shall be transferred to others. As is generally the case in the judgments of God, the nature of the punishment bears some resemblance to the nature of the transgression. "*He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword*" (Rev. xiii. 10).

III. The authority for the sentence. "Thus saith *the Lord*." God's authority to pronounce this doom upon the house of Eli springs—1. *From the relation which He sustains to men in general.* God was the absolute proprietor of the lives of these men, as He is of the life of every human creature. He, as we have seen (see on chap. ii. 6), is the giver of life to men; to Him also belongs the world, which He has "given to the children of men" (Ps. cxv. 16) for a dwelling-place, and, if men abuse His good gifts, He has an absolute right to deprive them of that which He has bestowed. 2. *But God had a special right to judge the house of Eli, a right springing from the special relation to Himself in which He had placed them.* As we have before seen, in considering the charge, as *Israelites* they had been objects of His special favour, as *men of the house of Aaron* they were brought into a closer relationship to God, and this threefold obligation gave to Jehovah a threefold authority to pronounce upon them and theirs this terrible yet deserved sentence.

IV. The principle upon which God exercises this authority over all men. "For them that honour me I will honour," etc. God can be known so as to be honoured. God must be known, not only as to His existence, but as to His character, in order to be honoured. Eli and his sons had enough knowledge of the character of Jehovah to make it possible for them to honour Him, they had enough knowledge to make their "lightly esteeming" Him a black transgression. Wherever men find moral excellence they are bound to honour it, their consciences call upon them to reverence goodness wherever it is found, and God here lays down a law of His government that He will not hold them guiltless who withhold from His perfect character the honour which is His due.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 29. "*And honourest thy sons above me.*" Choosing rather to gratify them than to glorify me, by abdicating them from the priesthood. But it may be Eli feared lest the high-priesthood should by this means go from his family, as it had before from Eleazar's for misdemeanour, which also afterwards befell him, and he by seeking to prevent it hastened it.—*Trapp.*

The well-fed beast becomes unmanageable and refractory, and refuses the yoke, and bursts the bonds (Jer. v. 5, 7, 8). So the priests, instead of being grateful for the provision made for them, in their pampered pride became dissatisfied, wantonly broke the laws of God which regulated their share of the offerings, and gave themselves up to an unbridled indulgence of their passions and their covetousness.—*Biblical Commentary.*

It is often easy to be exposed to this reproach of God without being aware of it. Those who labour to spread the light of Divine truth by publicly declaring it to the people certainly offer a sacrifice which may be very acceptable to God. But if they nourish in their hearts a secret pride, and if they seek in these holy services their own glory rather than the glory of God, they take for themselves the first-fruits of the sacrifice. They become the end of their action, and God is only the means. They put the creature before the Creator, and this is the greatest of all misplacements.—*De Sacy.*

Ver. 30. "*Them that honour Me, I will honour.*" This is a bargain of God's own making; you may bind upon it. "*And they that despise Me.*" God's visitation is like chequer-work, black and white.—*Trapp.*

Never did man dishonour God but it proved the greatest dishonour to himself. God will find out ways enough to wipe off any stain upon Him; but you will not so easily remove the shame and dishonour from yourselves.—*Baxter.*

There are three sorts of men to be considered with respect to the honour due to God. **I. Such as despise Him instead of honouring Him.** Such were the sons of Eli who *knew not the Lord.* Those do not *know God* who despise His services. It is impossible to *despise* infinite goodness, and power, and wisdom, for those are things which all that know them cannot but reverence and esteem. For a poor creature to despise his Creator, or one that lives upon the bounty of another to despise his benefactor, seems to be such an inconsistency in morality, as if human nature were incapable of it. . . . . But although God cannot be despised for His glorious perfections, yet His authority may be despised when men presumptuously break His laws—when "they profess to know God, but in works deny Him" (Tit. i. 16), when they own a God, and yet live as if there were none. **II. There are such as pretend to honour God, but do not.** Men may be guilty of dishonouring God under a pretence of honouring Him, by *worshipping their imaginations instead of Him, or by doing honour to Him according to their own imaginations, and not according to His will.* Persons form false conceptions of God, and so give their worship to an idol of their own fancy, and they pretend to honour Him not according to His will, but according to their own fancy. There are some things practised and defended in the Christian world, which one would hardly think possible to have ever prevailed, had it not been that men thought to do honour to God by them. **III. But there is a way left to give God that honour which is due unto Him.** I shall not take in all the ways of honouring God, but consider that which is most proper to the design of these words . . . . It was not for Eli's personal miscarriages that God thought Himself so dishonoured by him, but for want of taking due care in suppressing profaneness and corruption in others. And this shows the true way in which God may be honoured by those who are bound to take care of others. 1. By an universal discountenancing of all sorts of vices and profaneness. 2. By an even, steady, and impartial execution of the laws against vice and debauchery. 3. By a wise choice of fit instruments to pursue so good an end.—*Stillingfleet.*

Outwardly, we see nothing to blame in the personal conduct of Eli. All that can be expected is found; all due respect for his office, all proper solemnity in the discharge of it. He is just the character who would have been eulogised by the men of his day as doing honour to the post which he filled; who, as the saying is, would have been respected in his life and lamented at his death . . . . But we presently see that he had been only up to, not beyond the mark, for what was expected of him. *He* had sense enough of propriety and decency, creditably to discharge an office, to the capability of filling which this same sense alone raised him. He had never lived above his office. That God had delighted in burnt offerings and sacrifices he had impressed upon himself, and these things were the summit of his estimate. He had never learned that there are things better than sacrifices and more acceptable than the fat of rams. . . . . He knew not that in order to do good a man must live above, not up to, his outward duties; that influence with others is found not where life is raised up to the routine of duty, but where that routine of duty is quickened and inspired by a life led in higher places and guided by nobler motives. This sense of decency, this fine conservative feeling,

may get one man creditably through his work, but it has no power over those who grow up around him; it has no deep springs, no living and sparkling eye, no winning to something above itself; all its motives are secondary; what others did before, others will think now. . . . . Eli found, as men ever find, that all this system of secondary motive is nothing to curb the bounding heart of the young, or to win the guidance of their strong and precipitous course. He who dwells in the circumference of his life gains no sympathy from those who dwell in its centre. . . . . Such a state in the individual, the family, or the community, contains of necessity the elements of decay and of downward progress. . . . . What will be the effect on a community of the prevalence of a lifeless and conventional religion? First, and necessarily, a low standard of duty, up to that which is required by man, not beyond it. Next, a false estimate of realities; a substitution of primary objects for secondary ones; a growing conviction that this world is real, and another world visionary; that words and ceremonies will serve for religion; but that deeds all belong to self and the world. . . . . As Israel became acted upon by the system which prevailed under Eli, superstition succeeded to the fear of God. . . . Who taught his people to trust to the *ark* to save them, and to forget Him. . . To what must a people have been degraded, who could look on that ark, accompanied with two ministers of such iniquity and profligacy, and greet its arrival with shouts of triumph? . . . Where life is lived as unto God, and in His sight and His revelation of Himself held as a living present truth, there is the seed of all true happiness, of all true success, of all genuine *honour*. Such *men*, whether they prosper or fall, alone win the real prizes of life: solid usefulness, firm stability, inward peace. Such *families* alone are the nurseries for worthy future generations, where God's name is known and loved; where, if there be no glittering armour, no nicely jointed harness for the youthful warrior to go forth in, the young arm is at least familiar with the use of the simple sling, and knows where to cull the smooth stones from the river of the water of life. Such *nations* alone contain in them the pledges for sound and honourable progress, where the national religion is not a system upheld for venerable association's sake, but is a genuine portion of the people's life, a living seed expanding through its history . . . On the other hand, the man of mere proprieties gets to his grave in peace; the man of selfish views wins his prize, and becomes great and fills a space in the world, and passes away, but who cares for either? . . . The family where God was not, we have already followed in the same downward path; but who can tell, till the last dread day, the shame and misery and ruin which have overwhelmed men in generation after generation, for want of God as the guide of their youth? And if we ask respecting the fate of nations that have despised God—read it in the desolations of Nineveh and Babylon: read it in the history of the ancient people of God, scattered over the nations.—*Alford.*

God is honoured in general by avowed obedience to His holy will, but there are some acts which more signally conduce to God's glory. 1. *The frequent and constant performance (in a reverent manner) of devotions immediately addressed to His name* (Psalm xxix. 2). 2. *Using all things peculiarly related to God, His holy name, His holy word, His holy places, with especial respect* (Isa. lviii. 13). 3. *Yielding due observance to the deputies and ministers of God, as such* (Rom. xiii. 4; Mal. ii. 7, etc.). 4. *Freely spending what God hath given us in works of piety, charity, and mercy* (2 Cor. ix. 13; Prov. iii. 9, xiv. 31). 5. *All penitential acts, by which we submit to God, and humble ourselves before Him* (Josh. vii. 19; Rev. xvi. 9). 6. *Cheerfully undergoing afflictions, losses, disgraces, for the profession of God's truth* (John xxi. 19). 7. *By discharging faithfully those offices which God hath entrusted*

us with, and diligently improving those talents which God hath committed to us.—Barrow.

Ver. 33. The posterity of Eli possessed the high-priesthood in the time of Solomon, and even when that dynasty was preserved to another family, God preserved that of Eli; not to render it more happy, but to punish it by seeing the prosperity of its enemies, to the end that it might see itself destitute and despised. This shows the depth of the judgments of God, and the grandeur of His justice, which extends even to distant generations, and manifests itself to sinners both in life and death—both in their own disgrace and in the prosperity of their enemies. —*Calmet.*

Ver. 35. *The exercise of the priestly office*, which is well-pleasing to God: 1. Its personal *condition* and *pre-supposition*, fidelity, firmness, steadfastness, "I will raise Thee up a faithful priest." 2. Its *rule and measure.* "According to that which is in my heart and soul." 3. Its *blessing and reward.* "And I will build him a sure house," etc.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Of the priests under the law it might be generally said that they walked before the Lord's Anointed; or, in other words, they were appointed by His authority — they acted by His direction, and as his servants and representatives, till He should come personally to offer the one sacrifice on the strength of which their offerings had been made available on behalf of His believing people. And, in this view of the subject, the last clause of the verse conveyed another and more explicit assurance that the priesthood should be perpetuated during the Old Testament dispensation, notwithstanding all the calamities which might from time to time befall Israel. But it implied more. It contained a promise of blessing on that priesthood. To walk before the Lord's Anointed must, I think, have implied not only walking by His directions as servants, but walking in the light of His countenance as their approving Lord and Master, in so far as His Church was dependent on their services for her edification and comfort. And how frequently then must the people of God, in Old Testament times, have been comforted and refreshed in seasons of perplexity and trouble when they called to mind this gracious assurance. But it is to the New Testament Church that this passage has opened up, in all its fulness, the inexhaustible fountain of consolation which it contains. . . . . It is impossible for us to read the words without at least having Christ brought before us, and without feeling that to Him alone can the words be applied in their full, literal, and absolute sense. . . . . Christ is exalted to the throne of the universe, but He has not forgotten His priestly office. He regards it with complacency, and still executes it with delight; for "He is a priest upon His throne."—*Dr. R. Gordon.*

Ver. 36. See the *sin* and its *punishment.* They formerly *pampered* themselves, and *fed to the full* on the Lord's sacrifices, and now they are reduced to a *morsel of bread.* They *wasted* the Lord's heritage, and now they *beg their bread.* . . . In religious establishments vile persons, who have no higher motive, may and do get into the priest's office, that they may clothe themselves with the wool, and feed themselves with the fat, while they starve the flock. But where there is no law to back the claims of the worthless and the wicked, men of piety and solid merit only can find support, for they must live on the *free-will offerings* of the people. Where religion is established by law the strictest ecclesiastical discipline should be kept up, and all *hireling* priests and *drones* should be expelled from the Lord's vineyard.—*A. Clarke.*

Vers. 27–36. Indulgent parents are cruel to themselves and their posterity Eli could not have devised which way to have plagued himself and his house so much as by his kindness to his chil-

dren's sins. What variety of judgments does he now hear from the messenger of God! First, because his old age, which uses to be subject to choler, inclined now to misfavour his sons, therefore there shall not be an old man left of his house for ever; and because it vexed him not enough to see his sons enemies to God in their profession, therefore he shall see his enemy in the habitation of the Lord; and because himself forebore to take vengeance of his sons, and esteemed their life above the glory of his Master, therefore God will revenge Himself by killing them both in one day; and because he abused his sovereignty by conniving at sin, therefore shall his house be stripped of this honour, and see it translated to another; and lastly, because he suffered his sons to please their own wanton appetite, in taking meat off from God's trencher, therefore those which remain of his house shall come to his successor to beg a piece of silver and a morsel of bread . . . . I do not read of any fault Eli had but indulgence; and which of the notorious offenders were plagued more? Parents need no other means to make them miserable, than sparing the rod.—*Bishop Hall.*

God often contents himself with a single example of the estimation in which He holds the violation of certain duties. But one lesson so terrible ought to be sufficient to instruct every age, and unhappy is he who does not profit by it.—*Duguet.*

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—**Ver. 1. "The child Samuel."** According to Josephus, Samuel was now twelve years old. **"Precious,"** *i.e., rare.* "The word was rare that came directly from the Lord by prophetic announcement to the people; the proper organs were lacking, persons who were filled with the Spirit of the Lord, that they might be witnesses of His word; there was lacking also in the people the living desire for the direct revelations of God in His word" *(Lange's Commentary).* **"No open vision,"** lit. "no vision spread abroad." "Here vision includes all the ways whereby God revealed Himself to men. Which He did then so seldom that, whatsoever revelation there might be privately to some pious persons, there was none then publicly acknowledged to be a prophet" *(Patrick).*

Ver. 2. "His eyes began to wax dim." This mention of Eli's dimness of sight is introduced parenthetically. It explains Samuel's supposition that he had been called by Eli: the imperfect vision of the aged priest would make him dependent upon the services of an attendant, and these services Samuel was probably appointed to render" *(Hobson).* **"The lamp of God,"** *i.e.*, the seven-branched candlestick. "This stood in the centre, on the left of the entrance, and is now mentioned for the last time. It was superseded in the reign of Solomon by the ten separate candlesticks, but revived after the captivity by the copy of the one candlestick with the seven branches, as is still seen on the arch of Titus. It was the only light of the Tabernacle during the night" *(Dean Stanley).* **"Went out."** This indicates that the time was near morning. **"Temple."** See on chap. i. 9. "The sanctuary was so encased with buildings as to give it the name and appearance of a house or temple" *(Dean Stanley).* "Samuel slept in the court, where cells were built for the priests and Levites to live in when serving in the sanctuary. See ver. 15. *(Keil).* "The high-priest was not in domestic residence at the temple, much less, therefore, at the tabernacle. . . . . But Eli, who was now an aged man, with all his family grown up and settled in their own households, might, both from feeling and convenience, incline to reside constantly at his humble official lodge, under the shadow of the tabernacle. The proper place of Samuel would have been among the attendant Levites, but on account of his personal services to the high-priest, he rested not far from him" *(Kitto).* **"The Lord."** *Jehovah.* "This name stands after the *temple* because it is the Covenant God who descends to His people, and dwells with them, that is brought before us. On the other hand, in connection with the *lamp* and the *ark, Elohim* is used in the sense of the Divine in general" *(Lange's Commentary).*

Ver. 4. "The Lord called Samuel." "Probably by a voice from the ark in the Holy of Holies" *(Wordsworth)*

Ver. 5. "**He ran,**" etc. "Which shows the great readiness and promptness of his obedience, which made him come, yea, *run* at his first call" *(Patrick).*

Ver. 7. "**Did not yet know,**" etc. "He had not the special knowledge of God which was given by extraordinary revelation" *(Lange's Commentary).* "**Revealed,**" literally *uncovered.* "The metaphor is transferred in a certain way in Chap. ix. 15, where it is said (Hebrew) that the Lord *uncovered the ear* of Samuel. Our word *revelation* may be taken as including both these ideas" *(Hobson).* (See comments on ver. 21.)

Ver. 10. "**Stood.**" The voice becomes a vision. "A personal presence, not a mere voice, or impression upon Samuel's mind is here indicated" *(Bishop Hervey).*

Ver. 11. "**The ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.**" A mark of dread and horror. (See 2. Kings xxi. 12 and Jer. xix. 3.) "As a sharp, discordant noise pains one's ears, so the news of this harsh punishment shall give pain to all who hear of it" *(Lange's Commentary on Kings).*

Ver. 12. "**I will also make an end.**" "He does not mean that He would begin and make an end at once; but that He would persevere in His punishments, and not desist when He began, till all His threatenings were fulfilled, viz., in the death of Eli, and of his sons, and the slaughter of eighty-five priests of this family by Doeg, and the thrusting Abiathar out of his office, and so depriving that family of its dignity and honour" *(Patrick).*

Ver. 13. "**Judge.**" "To judge on account of a crime is the same as to punish it." (*Keil.*) "**Restrained.**" "He contented himself with mere remonstrance when, as High Priest and Judge in Israel, he had severer measures at his command, which he ought to have employed, setting aside his personal feelings of parental tenderness." (*Hobson.*)

Ver. 14. "**Sacrifice nor offering.**" "Neither the bloody nor unbloody offerings." (See Lev. xvi. 6.) "The sin of Eli's sons was so heinous as not to be purged by this appointed sacrifice." (*Hobson.*)

Ver. 15. "**Opened the doors.**" "This appears to have been a part of Samuel's duty. We have not to think of doors opening into the Holy Place, however, but of doors leading into the court." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 16. "**My Son.**" "How much is expressed in this *one* word." (*Thenius.*)

Ver. 17. Observe the climax in the words with which, in three sentences, Eli demands information from Samuel; it expresses the excitement of his soul. He *asks* for the word of the Lord; he *demands* an exact and complete statement, he adjures Samuel to conceal nothing from him." (*Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 19. "**None of his words fall to the ground.**" "A metaphor from arrows shot out of a bow, which hit the mark." (*Patrick.*)

Ver. 20. "**From Dan to Beersheba,**" *i.e.*, from the northern to the southern extremity of the land. Dan (anciently called Laish) was a northern frontier town, and Beersheba was situated on its southern border. "**That Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.**" "A very important statement." What Samuel did in offering sacrifices, etc. (see vii. 9) was not, as some seem to imagine, an irregular intrusion into the priestly office. But in a time of great degeneracy and confusion, when the exercise of the ordinary functions of the Levitical priesthood was in abeyance, Samuel was specially raised up by God, and received an extraordinary commission from Him to do what He did in maintaining the worship of God, and all Israel "*knew,*" by visible tokens, that he was established to be an expounder and interpreter of God's will *(Wordsworth).*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—VERSES 1—10.

The Voice of the Unseen.

I. Special preparation qualifies for special revelation. "Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli." In any branch of service, whether rendered to men or more directly to God, training is needed before a man is fit to fulfil its duties. Men to whom the voice of nature has spoken in any special manner are generally men who have been her students from their early years, and their long waiting upon her in her temple has made them capable of receiving special revelations from her. Newton and Faraday were made partakers of some of her secrets only

after years of training in her school, and the same may be said of the poets and artists whose ears have been opened, or whose vision has been enlightened in an especial manner to hear her voice, or to see her beauties. David's early days were spent in meditating upon the heavens that declared the glory of God and the firmament that showed the Divine handiwork. Doubtless this early training had much to do with his susceptibility to impressions from the works of God in nature in his after-life, and made him able to see God in all the things that He has made. God, by early training, fitted him to be not only a king and a soldier, but a poet. So Samuel was prepared, by early and special training, to receive special revelations from God.

II. Early religious training fits men for great and important work in after life. From his very early days Samuel dwelt in the sanctuary of the Lord, and was in daily attendance upon the services of His house. Corrupt as were some of those who ministered in holy things, there were doubtless some good and elevating influences around him which would accustom him to the thought of the God of his fathers, and tend to prepare him for the special work to which he was destined. The comparatively easy and pleasant ministry unto the Lord within His house prepared him for the sterner service he was to be called to render without the courts in a more public capacity. The sailor's child is first taught to handle an oar in the sheltered cove before his father's cottage in sight of home and within reach of his mother's eye. But this easy exercise is to fit him in after years to move out into the wide ocean and face the perils of the storm, and with a skilful hand pilot his vessel safely over a dangerous sea. The home-life of every well-trained child is a calm and peaceful bay, in which, encircled by loving laws and gentle words, he is being fitted to fight the difficulties and temptations of life outside the charmed circle. In due time he moves out into the vast sea of life, and finds himself in a world altogether different from his childhood's home; but the holy influences that were around him there have fitted him for taking his place and doing his work in the world, so as to glorify God and bless himself and others. So it ought to be with every member of a godly household, so it was with Samuel. The "gentleness of God" (2 Sam. xxii. 36) as he experienced it in the comparatively calm and peaceful atmosphere of his early days, made him fit to fulfil the arduous mission to which he was afterwards called, and strengthened him to fulfil all the Divine commands even to the terrific one of "hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord" (1 Sam. xv. 33). What a contrast was the last-mentioned stern service to the gentle ministry of his early days, but obedience to the will of God was doubtless the motive power in both. This habit of obedience is the one which above all others, perhaps, fits men bravely and faithfully to fulfil their duties to God and men. If a child has been accustomed from a sense of duty to render obedience to his human father or guardian he will come more readily to subject his will to his Divine Father. Submission to the lesser and imperfect being prepares the way for submission to the Almighty and Perfect One. We see from Samuel's ready response to what he supposed was the call of Eli, how accustomed he was to render implicit obedience to him who stood to him in the place of his earthly father, and this submission to a human will and authority was one of the most important elements in his early training to fit him in after life to render unhesitating obedience to the word of the Lord, and to shrink from no service which He called upon him to perform.

III. God speaks when His speech is most needed. Rain is never so precious as when famine has set in from lack of it. When the clouds have for long ceased to yield refreshment to the earth, then every drop is as precious as gold. When there is lack of the rain of heaven, then there is dearth, and disease, and death. So is it in the spiritual world when there is a lack of spiritual teaching. From

this soul-famine there springs apace all kinds of spiritual diseases, and souls perish for lack of bread. In Israel, at this period of its history, there was such a soul-famine, and with few exceptions its whole "head was sick, and its heart was faint" in consequence, and "wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores" broke out in the lives of those who ought to have been fit mediums for the descent of that spiritual rain which makes glad the wilderness and the solitary place, and causes the spiritual desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. In this time of great need God broke the long silence, and in this word coming to Samuel there was "a sound of" that "abundance of rain" which was to be poured down upon this highly-favoured people almost unceasingly until the time of Malachi. This voice of God, coming to the youthful Samuel in the night watches, was to be the beginning of a long series of "open visions," and of an abundant revelation of the mind and will of God. But the first drops of the shower fell in a time of spiritual drought, and famine, and disease.

IV. God speaks through spiritually qualified instruments. A coloured glass is not a fit medium to transmit the pure white light of the sun. A blackened glass almost entirely shuts out his rays; light can hardly find any entrance through such a medium. God's silence had been of so long continuance because those who ought to have been fit mediums to transmit His word were utterly incapable even of receiving it. Neither Eli nor his sons were qualified instruments by which God could reveal His will to the people. Even the high-priest himself was not one whose spiritual nature was sufficiently awake to render him capable of receiving visions of God. And he who would reveal to others the word of the Lord must be able first to see and hear for himself. But Samuel was of an entirely different nature. His ear had been rendered susceptible to spiritual voices, his eyes were fitted to discern spiritual realities, and his will was so far in harmony with the will of God—his desire to serve the Lord was so far single and unbiassed,—as to render him a fit medium through which the light of the Divine word could be transmitted.

V. The unseen world is as real as that which is seen. The personality of Eli in the tabernacle was one that could be seen—it was within the reach of Samuel's bodily senses. But he came to be conscious of a Person, quite as real, though ordinarily beyond the reach of his vision. He who spoke to Samuel in his sleep was as real an existence as was the priest to whom he at first attributed the voice. That Samuel at first mistook the voice of the invisible God for the voice of the visible Eli shows how strongly he was assured of the reality of the person who spoke to him—how certain he felt that the voice belonged to a real and actual existence. That which is unseen by our mortal eye is as real, and is as near to us, as that which our bodily vision can apprehend, and it only needs God to awaken our spiritual senses to make us conscious of this. Many a man can testify from his own experience that communion with God is quite as much a reality as any communion with man. Samuel, during his minority, had many a conversation with the aged Eli, and had doubtless received some good impressions from his intercourse with the old priest. But the intercourse which he held from this time forth with a person who spoke to him from the invisible world was as real and far more impressive than any he had ever had with the person before whom he had so long ministered to the Lord. So real was it, and so strong an impression did it make upon him that he could afterwards reproduce the words that had been spoken to him, and felt that communion with Him whose dwelling is not with flesh, was a more influential fact of his life than any intercourse with men. He had been conversant with many facts concerning Jehovah before this time, but he now awoke to such a personal consciousness of His existence, and such an abiding sense of His nearness, that up to this crisis in his history it is said of him that he "knew not the Lord."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. Since the extraordinary gifts stand in close connection with the ordinary, we must conclude that the latter also were sparingly dealt out, that among the masses there was a great deal of lukewarmness, and even open apostasy. The want of a reformation was urgent. That the extraordinary gifts, however, had not quite disappeared, we learn from the example of the man of God who comes to Eli to upbraid him with his sins and also to announce the Divine judgment. And with respect to the ordinary gifts, we are led to the conclusion that there was at that time a not inconsiderable *ekloge*, not only by the institution of holy women (see Critical Notes on chap. ii. 21), but also by the custom of the Nazarite, of which we have two contemporaneous examples in Samson and Samuel, and must therefore have been pretty widely spread. Hence we infer that the spirit of piety was by no means dead, especially since an institution such as that of the Nazarites stands in close connection with the whole national tendency, and can only flourish when more or less supported by it.—*Hengstenberg.*

Faithful in little, and therefore entrusted with more, being the next famous prophet to Moses, and called the first (Acts iii. 24, 2 Chron. xxxv. 18).—*Trapp.*

The time of Samuel's appearance in Israel as prophet was a time of an *internal judgment of God*, which consisted in the lack of *intercourse of God with His people by revelation.* It was a *theocratic interdict* incurred by the continual apostasy of the people from their God . . . Such a judgment came upon Saul (chap. xxviii. 6, 15) . . . . The same law presents itself in all periods of the kingdom of God; men lose the source of life, God's revealed word, by a Divine judgment, when they withdraw from intercourse with the living God, and will not accept His holy word as the truth which controls their whole life.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 2. God lets old Eli sleep, who slept in his sin; and awakes Samuel to tell him what He would do with his master. He, who was wont to be the mouth of God to the people, must now receive the message of God from the mouth of another; as great persons will not speak to those with whom they are highly offended, but send them their checks by others.—*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 4. *He answered "Here am I."* A hearing ear is a sweet mercy; and a heavy ear, a grievous judgment (Isa. vi. 9).—*Trapp.*

Ver. 5, 6. He would not have lain down to sleep had he thought that the Lord had spoken unto him. So, if men did but consider that God speaketh unto them by His ministers, they would hear and heed much better. How oft do we either turn a deaf ear to God's call, or else mistake, and run another way, till He please to speak home to our hearts, and cause us to hear Him.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 10. For the first time Samuel stands with consciousness in the presence of the majesty of God—and immediately all the riddles of life begin to be solved for him, and the meaning of *his own life* to become clear. What he says bears the clearest stamp of a *really begun communion with the Lord.* Is it not the resolve to say and to do all that the Lord might show him of His lofty thoughts and ways—is it not this, and nothing but this, that is expressed in "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth?" Has he not thereby once for all renounced self-knowing and self-will? That was the *faithfulness* as a prophet, which all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, recognised in him (ver. 20). And that which thus first established a true communion with the Lord could also alone be the power that maintained it. The constant prayer, "Speak, Lord," and the constant vow, "Thy servant heareth"—that is the hand which takes hold of

God's right hand, to be held fast by it with everlasting life. "*Speak, Lord,*" etc., *a testimony of unconditional devotion to the Lord.* 1. *How such a testimony is reached* (*a*), through the Lord's awakening call; (*b*), through receptivity of heart for God's word; (*c*) through the deed of self-denial in the renunciation of all self-knowledge and self-will. 2. *What is therein testified and praised before the Lord*—(*a*) humble subjection [speak, *Lord*]; (*b*) steadfast dependence on the Lord in free love [*Thy* servant]; (*c*) unconditional, joyful obedience to His will [Thy servant *heareth*]. *Conditions of a blessed fulfilment of one's calling for the kingdom of God*—1. The experience of the power of the Divine word: I have called thee by name. 2. The repeated call in prayer, "*Speak. Lord.*" 3. The fulfilment of the vow: "Thy servant heareth." — *Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 10—21.

The Sin of Omission and the Grace of Submission.

I. The mere omission of one man may be the calamity of many. Many and terrible disasters have often been brought upon many people by one man's omission in the performance of his duty. If the man who stands at the wheel of the vessel omits to look at the compass, he may bring death or ruin to hundreds of his fellow-creatures, as well as loss of reputation to himself if he should survive the wreck. If one miner neglects properly to secure his light, the death of all his fellow-workmen may as truly lie at his door as if he had slain each one separately with his own hand. Omissions permit the play of forces which are destructive to human life, and therefore are sometimes as guilty as *commissions.* Eli's great sin was a sin of omission: "His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them *not.*" His omission of parental restraint permitted the unchecked play of the evil passions of his children, and brought as sure and as terrible a destruction upon them as if he had taken their lives with his own hand. And the evil consequences of his neglect of restraint did not end with them; the mischief which was thus left to work spread into every household in the land, and soon the whole nation had cause to mourn over their high-priest's omission of his duty. If Eli *had* restrained his sons, he would certainly have delivered his own soul from blood-guiltiness, and might have delivered them from such a public execution, and the nation from overwhelming disgrace. Mere protestation against sin will do something to stem the tide, or if it is powerless to do that it is a witness against it. A godly man can sometimes do no more than can a pillar in the midst of an eddying river. He can but offer the resistance of his own life and words to the prevailing current of iniquity. He cannot check its onward course. Less than this will not deliver him from guilt, but this will do it. "*If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, if he do not turn from his way he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.*" (Ezek. xxxiii. 8, 9.) This is all that God requires when men can do no more. Eli had hardly done this and his power to do more—to hinder his sons from continuing their public profanation of God's house and services—constituted him a partaker in their sins, and to some extent in their punishment when he "restrained them not." This great omission of his life made him the instrument of bringing the wrath of God, not only upon his house but upon his nation.

II. A noble nature has no pleasure in the downfall of a rival. A generous soul is grieved at the afflictions that come upon men even through their own sin

He not only "rejoiceth not in iniquity" but rejoiceth not in the punishment that iniquity brings even when the downfall of the evil-doer is the occasion of his own promotion. If a young man sorrows over the just disgrace of those whose fall is his own stepping-stone to promotion, he shows that he is possessed of a truly noble disposition. Samuel was not gladdened by being thus honoured by God, seeing that the message he received was charged with heavy tidings concerning those whom he honoured to some extent. Some consciousness of his own advancement must have been borne in upon him by this revelation—he must have had some presentiment that the setting of Eli's sun would be the rise of his own, yet he shrinks from showing the vision evidently not only from unwillingness to grieve his aged friend, but from a sense of sorrow at the terrible retribution which awaited him and his.

III. The highest wisdom under Divine chastisement is the submission which justifies God. There are children who will justify their human parents even when they are under correction, because they have such confidence in the character of those parents, and because their own consciences convict them of deserving that which they are now suffering. God's children should always be able to do this. They ought to be so assured of His unimpeachable justice and wisdom, as well as of His love, as to be able at all times to echo the words of Eli, and thus to "justify the ways of God to men." Eli here proves himself a true son of Abraham in the full assent he gives to Abraham's assurance, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25) Being fully convicted of his own negative sins, and of the positive crimes of his children, he takes the course of true wisdom, and yields himself and his family into the hands of that King who he knows can do no wrong.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 11. When God executes judgment upon anyone, all should tremble at these examples of severity upon others, and say with Paul, "*Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear*" (Rom. xi. 20).—*De Sacy.*

Ver. 12. Execution of justice is God's work, though His strange work (Isa. xxviii. 21), and when once He beginneth, He will go thorough-stitch with it; He will neither dally nor desist till it be done.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 13. The judgment that was to fall on Ithamar is the likeness of the judgment which has followed the corruption and the nepotism of the clergy everywhere. It was to begin with the alienation of the people from the worship of the sanctuary; it was to end in a violent revolution, which should overthrow with bloodshed, confiscation, and long humiliation the ancient hereditary succession and the whole existing hierachy of Israel.—*Stanley.*

Parents cannot do God's work, and God will not do *theirs;* but if they use the means, God will not withhold His blessing.—*A. Clarke.*

Oh, it is dangerous to do the work of God negligently. Eli was a magistrate, and should have put forth his authority and punished those ungodly children. . . . . That you (who are magistrates) be terrors to evil-doers is expressed as one of your chief duties (Rom. xiii. 3). . . . . If you are not, look to yourself, for God hath iron hands for justices that have leaden heels, and will one day strike them home for forswearing themselves to spare others. He will be a terror to thee and make thee a terror to thyself, who will not at His command be a terror to evil-doers. Thou sinnest in others whilst thou sufferest them to sin, and thou shalt one day suffer with them (Rev. xviii. 4). . . . Cowards are more fit to be slaves than rulers. A

magistrate should be like Moses: in his own cause as meek as a lamb, in God's cause as stiff as an oak, as bold as a lion. . . . . He that spareth the bad hurteth the good. The chirurgeon must cut off incurable members, and the physician of the State must purge out the peccant humours of the body politic, lest they infect and injure the whole.—*Swinnock.*

"*For the iniquity which he knoweth.*" Both by that prophet (chap. ii. 29), and by that domestical chaplain, his conscience.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 13, 14. *The guilt and consequences of parental unfaithfulness.* I. The sin here mentioned. It is not said that Eli set his sons a bad example. It is evident, on the contrary, that his example was good. Nor is he accused of neglecting to admonish them; for we are told that he reproved them in a very solemn and affectionate manner. . . . But though Eli admonished he did not restrain. He did not employ the authority with which he was clothed, as a parent, to prevent them from indulging their depraved inclinations. . . . Every parent who is not as careful of the morals as he is of the health of his children; everyone who takes more care of the literary than of the moral and religious education of his children, is guilty of this sin. II. The punishments denounced. They are here denounced generally; but are described at large in the preceding chapter. 1. *That most of his posterity shall die early.* The sin of which Eli was guilty *naturally* tends to produce the consequence here threatened. . . . If parents wish their sons to die before they reach half the common age of man, they cannot adopt measures better calculated to produce this effect than to cast loose the reins of parental authority. 2. *That such of his children as were spared should prove a grief and vexation, rather than a comfort to him.* . . . . This was not less terribly fulfilled in the family of David. . . . . We are told respecting one of his children, that his father had not displeased him at any time, saying, Wherefore hast thou done so? We may then conclude that he was equally culpable in his treatment of his other children. And what was the consequence? . . . . . This part of the threatened punishment, like the former, is the natural and almost inevitable consequence of the sin against which it is denounced. . . . Especially will such parents usually meet with unkindness and neglect from their children if they live to be dependent on them in their old age. 3. *That his posterity should be poor and contemptible.* . . . . . Children who are not restrained by their parents will almost inevitably contract habits of idleness, instability, and extravagance, which naturally lead to poverty and contempt. Here again we see the natural consequences of Eli's sin in its punishment. Lastly, *God declares that none of the methods thus appointed to obtain the pardon of sin, should avail to procure pardon for the iniquity of his house.* This awful threat conveyed a plain intimation that they should die in their sins, and this too, was the natural consequence of his conduct. He had suffered them to follow without restraint those courses which rendered them unfit for heaven until their day of grace was past. . . . . They were given up to a hard heart and a reprobate mind. They could not now be brought to repentance, and, of course, no sacrifice nor offering could purge away their sins. . . . . Thousands now in the region of despair, and thousands more on their way to join them will for ever curse their parents as the authors of their misery. The terrible punishments denounced against this sin show how exceedingly displeasing it is to God. 1. Because it proceeds from wicked and hateful principles . . . Sometimes it proceeds from the love and practice of vice . . . In religious parents, it almost invariably proceeds from indolence and selfishness . . . There is also much unbelief, much contempt of God, and much positive disobedience in this sin. 2. Because it entirely frustrates His design in establishing the family state. 3. On

account of the good which it prevents, and the infinite evil which it produces . . . . No sin tends to produce more or greater evil and misery. 4. Because those who are guilty of it act a most unnatural part. God knew that it would not be safe to trust us with the education of immortal souls, unless we had powerful inducements to be faithful to the trust. He, therefore, implanted in the heart of parents a strong affection for their offspring, that they might be thus induced to educate them as they ought. But those who neglect to restrain their children do violence to this powerful operative principle, and may be said to be like the heathen, without natural affection.—*Payson.*

Ver. 15. As the child Samuel was not elated by this vision and revelation vouchsafed to him in the temple, but went humbly to Eli, and when it was morning did the daily work prescribed to him,—so the child Jesus, after the honour paid to him in the temple, "went down to Nazareth, and was subject" to Mary and Joseph (Luke ii. 51). —*Wordsworth.*

As this is the first circumstance which throws light upon the character of one who was destined to become a great man in Israel, it behoves us to regard it well. Most lads of his age evince much eagerness in communicating anything surprising, without much regard to the pain it may be calculated to inflict. Samuel knew that he had been highly honoured by a special communication from God. The burden of a great doom had been imparted to him, and such secrets of high import it is hard for youth to bear undisclosed. But with Samuel there was one consideration that overruled every other. The secret concerned his venerable lord, who had been as a father to him, and could not fail to afflict his spirit.—*Kitto.*

Ver. 18. Though we must groan and feel God's hand, yet we must not grumble and fret at His dealings. Patience is thy duty under the sharpest providence. He is too just to be questioned, too good to be suspected, and too great to be quarrelled with. Eli doth not fall in His face in a passion, but falls down at His feet in humble submission.—*Swinnock.*

"*Told him every whit.*" Bitter truths must be spoken, however they be taken, and if ministers be mannerly in the form, yet in the matter of their message let them be resolute.—*Trapp.*

If Eli have been an ill father to his sons, yet he is a good son to God, and is ready to kiss the very rod he shall smart withal: "It is the Lord," whom I have ever found holy and just, and gracious, and He cannot but be Himself; "let Him do what seemeth Him good," for whatsoever seemeth to be good to Him, cannot but be good, howsoever it seems to me. Every man can open his hand to God while He blesses; but to expose ourselves willingly to the afflicting hand of our Maker, and to kneel to Him while He scourges us, is peculiar only to the faithful.—*Bishop Hall.*

I. A judicious discovery from whence all evils come. "*It is the Lord.*" He is omnipotent, and who hath withstood His power He is just, and will bring no evil without good cause. He is wise, and whatsoever evil He bringeth He can draw it to a good end. . . . . He remaineth the same God in the fire and in the earthquake which He was in the still voice; the same when He slew the Israelites as when His light shone upon their tabernacle. His glorious attributes cross not one another. His justice taketh not from His mercy, nor His mercy from the equity of His justice; but He is just when He bindeth up, and merciful when He woundeth us. . . . The same God that overthrew Pharaoh in the Red Sea, that "slew great and mighty kings" (Psa. cxxxvi. 15, 17, 18) did deliver up His own people, did deliver up the ark to Dagon: for His justice, His wisdom, and His mercy "did endure for ever." **II. A well-grounded resolution.** Let us learn with Eli to "kiss the Son, lest He be angry" (Psa. ii. 12), nay, to kiss Him, and bow before Him when He is angry; to offer Him up a

peace-offering, our wills, of more power than a hecatomb, than all our numerous fasts and sermons, to appease His wrath. . . . This is the truest surrendry we can make. . . . "I do not only obey God, and do what He would have me, but I am of His mind," saith the heathen Seneca." . . . The stubbornest knee may be made to bow, and obedience may be constrained. But the true Israelite doeth it with joy and readiness, and though he receive a blow he counteth it as a favour, for He that gave it hath taught him an art to make it so.—*Anthony Faringdon.*

Ver. 20. Not only of the whole Church in general, but of every Christian hearer in particular, it is demanded that, with reference to the doctrine taught, he shall perceive whether it is right and true or not, and stand his ground. In the case of Samuel the word did not hold good—"the prophet has no honour in his own country." He comes before us here as *a prophet who has much honour in his own country*—(1) Because he was a faithful prophet of God; (2) because he was counted worthy by God of continual revelations through His word; (3) and God confirmed his proclamations by the publicly manifested fulfilment of them as a fulfilment of *his* word.—*Cramer.*

When Samuel had entered into an immediate relation to God, a relation between him and the nation also began. He receives through them the dignity of a prophet, of a mediator between God and the nation. With him prophecy mounted a new step. While the prophets had previously entered powerfully into the history only in solitary decisive instances, *his* prophetic activity was a continuous one.—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 21. God breaks through the silence of many years, and reveals Himself to Samuel. Wherefore was this? Samuel had a childlike faith; therefore he was very dear to God. The words are remarkable, "the child was a *child*" (see notes on chap. i. 24), and "he grew before the Lord." He was a child in innocence, humility, simplicity, holiness. He was holy amid scenes of unholiness. In spite of the pernicious example of Eli's sons, the priests of God, the child stood firm; he was true to God in the most trying circumstances, therefore God revealed Himself to him. The child Samuel was preferred to the aged Eli, the high priest and judge; and thus, as *Theodoret* remarks, God showed that holy childhood is better than hoar hairs. He was "wiser than the aged," and had "more understanding than his teachers," because he "kept God's commandments" (Psa. cxix. 99, 100).—*Wordsworth.*

The Lord *revealed* Himself to Samuel. It is with, perhaps, one exception the earliest instance of the use of the word which has since become the name for all Divine communication. "The Lord *uncovered the ear*," such is the literal expression; a touching and significant figure taken from the manner in which the possessor of a secret moves back the long hair of his friend, and whispers into the ear thus laid bare the word that no one else may hear. It is a figure which precisely expresses the most universal and philosophical idea conveyed by the term "Revelation," thence appropriated in the theological language of both East and West. "The Father of Truth," says Professor Muller—indicating his own use of this phrase to describe the mission of the Semitic races—"chooses His own prophets, and He speaks to them in a voice stronger than the voice of thunder. It is the same inner voice through which God speaks to all of us. That voice may dwindle away and become hardly audible; it may lose its Divine accent, and sink into the language of worldly prudence; but it may also from time to time assume its real nature with the children of God, and sound into their ears as a voice from heaven. A "Divine instinct" would neither be an appropriate name for what is a gift or grace accorded but to few, nor would it be a more intelligible word than "special" revelation.—*Stanley.*

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"And the word of Samuel,"** etc. Commentators are divided in their opinions whether this clause is connected with the rest of the chapter, and whether it signifies that Israel went out to battle by the command of Samuel. Many think they entered into the conflict without Divine direction; but Keil says, "The two clauses, '*The word of Samuel came to all Israel*' and '*Israel went out*,' etc., are to be logically connected together in the following sense: 'At the word or instigation of Samuel, Israel went out against the Philistines to battle." There is no doubt that the Philistines were ruling over Israel at this time. **"Ebenezer."** This name was not given to the place until a later period (see chap. vii. 12). **"Aphek."** As this word means *strength*, or *firmness*, it is applicable to any fort or fastness; and there were several places so named in Palestine. According to chap. vii. 12 this *Aphek* must have been near *Mizpeh*, probably the *Mizpeh* of Benjamin mentioned in Josh. xviii. 26, and identified by Robinson as the present *Neby Samwil*, five miles north-west of Jerusalem.

Ver. 2. **"Joined battle."** "This word describes the sudden mutual assault of the opposing lines." *(Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 3. **"Let us fetch the ark,"** etc. "In recommending this extraordinary step, the elders might recollect the confidence it imparted to their ancestors (Numb. x. 35; xiv. 44), as well as what had been done at Jericho. But it is more probable that they were influenced by the heathenish ideas of their idolatrous neighbours, who, in order to animate their soldiers and ensure victory, carried the statuettes of their gods in shrines, or their sacred symbols to their wars, believing that the power of those divinities was inseparably associated with, or residing in, their images." *(Dr. Jamieson.)*

Ver. 4. **"The people."** "It was the army that here acted, rather than the people in a political capacity, but the word 'people' perhaps points to the absence of a regular army." *(Tr. of Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 7. **"God is come into the camp."** "The ark is called by the sacred writer 'The ark of *the Lord* (Jehovah)', but the Philistines, being heathens, say that '*Elohim* is come into the camp;' and they speak of God in the plural number—'These mighty gods.'" *(Wordsworth.)* "Just as all the heathen feared the might of the gods of other nations in a certain degree, so the Philistines also were alarmed at the might of the God of the Israelites." *(Keil.)* **"There hath not been such a thing heretofore."** "The ark was always carried by the priests in the van (Numb. x. 33; Josh. iii. 14), and, with one solitary exception, when the attack upon the Amalekites and the Canaanites was made in spite of an express prohibition of Moses, it was invariably carried with them in their early wars. But when they had become settled in Canaan, and the ark was established in Shiloh, the practice of carrying it into the field was discontinued, till now that ignorance and superstitious fear revived it." *(Dr. Jamieson.)*

Ver. 10. **"There fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen."** "The slaughter in ancient warfare seems, from the record of profane as well as sacred history, to have been often immensely greater than in modern times, since the introduction of gunpowder and artillery. And in the nature of the case it must have been when the soldiers of opposing armies met in close combat—man engaged in mortal strife with man; and when the weapons, too, were tipped with poison, the result could not be otherwise than a fearful carnage. The great numbers, then, of the Israelites who are recorded in this passage (as well as in similar ones) to have fallen in battle, and which have called forth the sneers of the infidels as gross exaggerations, are, from the character of the context, perfectly credible, and the statements of the sacred historian are not only in the present instance corroborated by the testimony of *Josephus*, but harmonise with the recital of *Herodotus*, and other historians, as to the vast mortality that frequently marked the battles of antiquity." *(Dr. Jamieson.)*

Ver. 13. **"Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside."** "This sitting on the side of the way by which the first message must come answers precisely to the intense expectation in which Eli, though blind, had taken this position, so as, if not with the eyes, yet with the sense of hearing, to learn straightway the arrival of the first messenger. He sits, as in chap. i. 9, at the inner, so here at the outer, gate of the sanctuary, on his seat, and, as appears from verse 18, on the side of the gate, which was also, therefore, the side of the adjacent way." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 14. **"When Eli heard the noise of the crying."** "His blindness explains the fact that he failed to observe the messenger who ran hurriedly by without noticing him." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 15. **"His eyes were dim,"** literally, **"*his eyes stood.*"** "This is a description of the so-called black cataract (*amaurosis*), which generally occurs at a very great age from paralysis of the optic nerve." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 21. "Ichabod," *i.e., Not-Glory.* The narrator has in mind her words upon which she based that ejaculation, but does not state them as hers till afterward; *here* he states beforehand the fact contained in them as a historical explanation. We must note, however, the difference between *his* explanation and *her* reason for that exclamation in verse 22. While *he* mentions the reference to the two dead, *she* bases the name on the one thing only, the capture of the ark." (*Erdmann.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 1 *and* 2.

The First Defeat at Ebenezer.

On the connection of the first clause of this verse with the following paragraph see Critical and Expository Notes on the chapter. Adopting the view of Kiel and others, we remark—

I. That there may be an obedience which will bring punishment. Upon the people and upon the priests of Israel at this time there rested the curse of unpardoned sin. Eli's sons had neither confessed their guilt nor amended their lives, and the religion of the entire nation was very much like that depicted by Isaiah at a later period, when, delivering the word of the Lord, he tells both rulers and people that their "*incense is an abomination,*" and their feasts a "*trouble and a weariness*" unto the Most High because they had forsaken Him in their hearts. (See Isa. i. 1–15.) Therefore punishment came to them while in the act of obeying the word of the Lord by Samuel. As there had been no obedience unto *life*, there was now an obedience unto *death*. This act of obedience was doubtless in conformity to the national desire, and the desire to free themselves from the yoke of the Philistines was both natural and right in itself, but it was unaccompanied by a willingness to submit to the righteous law of Jehovah and to obey His word, and therefore it brought judgment instead of blessing. There are many parallel cases in individual history. Many men make plans and try to gratify desires which may in themselves be lawful, but they cannot have the Divine blessing because they set aside the indispensable Divine condition of having in the first place a right relation to God by pardon of sin and righteousness of life; and therefore their efforts to free themselves from difficulties or to gain a more desirable condition often end in placing them in a worse position than they were in at first. But in the case before us it was not the mere effort to gratify a lawful desire that brought the judgment, but an undertaking engaged in in obedience to a Divine command. As in the case of Balaam, obedience was made a means of punishment. That false prophet at last set out on his journey in obedience to the word of the Lord, but "God's anger was kindled because he went" (Num. xxii. 22), and punishment came to him even in his obedience. Israel at this time desired a national victory without national repentance—they desired freedom from the yoke of the Philistines without submission to the yoke of Jehovah, and thought that this would be true freedom. Their numbers were great, and they imagined that numbers would avail them in conflict with their ancient enemy, even although they lacked cleanness of hands and purity of heart before God. They ignored the conditions of success laid down for them by the mouth of Moses—"*If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth. . . . and the Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face; they shall come out against thee one way and shall flee seven ways.*" But they again found from bitter experience that the Divine threatening was no idle word. "*But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and*

His statutes which I command thee this day. . . . . the Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies; thou shalt go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them" (Deut. xxviii. 1, 7, 15, 25).

II. Where the moral condition for victory is wanting, it is better to have defeat. The word which came to Israel and led them out to defeat was a blessing, because defeat was just what they needed at the time. The defeat in circumstance that leads to an improvement in character is a victory in reality. If national or individual loss in material things leads to moral gain, it is better than the most splendid worldly success. How terrible seemed the defeat of all the purposes and plans of the mighty monarch of Babylon when he was "driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen;" but it was a great moral victory, for it brought him to a higher moral standing, and taught him to *"praise and honour Him that liveth for ever and ever"* (Dan. iv. 34). Many a man in humbler walks of life has learned to know himself and his God in the day which has seemed to bring him nothing but defeat and ruin. The defeat of Israel at this time was the first of a series of steps by which, under the rule of Samuel, they rose to a more healthy state of national life; and, therefore, what was in the first instance a judgment was in the end a blessing. A victory over the Philistines, when they were in a state of opposition to God, would have been a far greater national calamity in the end than the two crushing defeats recorded in this chapter. Freedom from chastisement, either in the nation or in the individual, is the most terrible curse which God can inflict. Far better is it to suffer the severest punishment for sin.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 1. Not only were the people to learn that the Lord had departed from them, but Samuel also was to make the discovery that the deliverance of Israel from the oppression and dominion of its foes was absolutely impossible without its inward conversion to God.—*Keil.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3—11.

The Capture of the Ark.

I. Here is failure in a lawful enterprise. If a man finds himself so oppressed by a stronger power that his moral nature suffers in consequence, it is both lawful and right to endeavour to free himself from the yoke of the oppressor. Especially if he finds himself the slave of habits which tend to his moral degeneration, he is bound, out of regard for his own real interests, to use every means within his reach to obtain his freedom. The enterprise against soul-oppression, whether individual or national, is always lawful. If a nation is under such a yoke of bondage, and can find no way to liberty except through strife—if it finds that by reason of its oppression it is sinking in the moral scale, and sees no possibility of bettering its condition, except by the sword—such a nation is justified in resorting to the use of such means. Israel was so oppressed by the Philistines. The yoke of the heathen was not only injurious to them materially but spiritually. It was not only a national humiliation but it tended to national degradation of soul. Therefore they were fully justified in using every lawful effort to be free, and they were not defeated because they were engaged in an undertaking which was in itself displeasing to God.

II. Here is failure in a lawful enterprise because undertaken in a wrong spirit. As we have seen in considering the first defeat recorded in this chapter, Israel

undertook to throw off the yoke of the Philistines without submission to the yoke of God, and this was altogether contrary to the Divine revealed will concerning them. They must first submit to Jehovah, and then their enemies would submit to them. "*O, Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me, there shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. . . . . Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto Him; but their time should have endured for ever*" (Ps. lxxxi. 8-15). But they were not willing to lend an obedient ear to the Word of the Lord, and therefore the Lord's hand was turned against them in their day of need. This subject is full of teaching for the individual man. The soul of every man is by nature more or less enslaved by appetites and passions which will degrade him if he does not war against them. But there is but one way to do this successfully. There must be submission to the yoke of God before we can cast off the yoke of sin and Satan. Man's will in its present condition is not strong enough to overcome the evil within his own heart. "*To will*" may "*be present with him, but how to perform that which he wills he finds not*" (Rom. vii. 18). There must be submission to a higher will before the Philistines of the heart can be brought into subjection. We are "*made free from sin*" by becoming "*servants to God*" (Rom. vi. 22)—by falling in with His method of salvation by the death of His Son, and thus receiving from Him the Divine help by which alone we can conquer sin within us. The man who sets out to free himself from the bondage of any sinful habit in any other way will find himself in the condition of Israel at this time—he will be baffled and beaten on every side, and will have to give up the contest in despair. The evil spirit may go out for a time, but when he returns he will find the house unoccupied by any stronger power, and "*then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first*" (Matt. xii. 43–45).

III. Failure in any lawful enterprise demands inquiry into the cause of the failure. Even Israel said, "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day?" (ver. 3). He who has failed to overcome any sinful habit within himself, or has been defeated in his efforts to lessen the power of evil in the world, should ask himself why it is so. If he knows that the end for which he strives is for the glory of God, he will do well to suspect that the cause of the failure rests with himself, and a searching and sincere inquiry into the state of his own heart may lead to some wholesome discoveries, and prevent defeat in future efforts. Israel here admits that the hand of God was behind the hand of the Philistines, and that it was Jehovah who had smitten them by the sword of their enemies; but their inquiry lacked earnestness and sincerity. They admit that their failure demands investigation, but they stop short without arriving at the real cause of their defeat. They were unwilling to push the question to its final issue; but such a question asked with a desire to find the real answer cannot fail to bring instruction to the man who asks it.

IV. Unwillingness to admit the real cause of failure will probably lead to the use of means which will end in greater disaster. The inhabitants of a house which is built upon a sandy foundation may blame the thunder when the walls rock and crack beneath the storm, and they may seek to render themselves secure by making the walls thicker and the roof more firm. But all such efforts are only making more certain the ultimate fall of the building—all that is added to a structure upon such a foundation is only hastening its downfall and the destruction of its inhabitants. They have entirely missed the real root of

the mischief. The thunder may be the *occasion* of the damage, but it is not the *cause*. *That* is to be found in the nature of the soil upon which the house is built, and their failure to find it leads them to use means which end in greater disaster. So it was with Israel in their first defeat. They did not search deep enough to find the real cause of their discomfiture. The Philistines under God were the *occasion*, but their own sin was the *cause* of their misfortune, and failing to find it they rushed to the use of means which resulted in a more shameful defeat and a more terrible humiliation. To send for the ark of God into the field was useless, because that state of heart was wanting which made the symbol of God's presence anything more than a chest of wood—it was but to cast greater dishonour upon the God whose favour alone made the ark a sacred thing, and thus to add another sin to the many which already stained their national history. And God demonstrates the uselessness and unlawfulness of their effort by permitting this most sacred symbol to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines.

V. Relationship to the victories of the past without the character of the victors may lead to wrong inferences and fatal results. There are many men of the present day who have a special relationship to the great events of the past, because they are descendants of those who were the actors in those events. But if they infer from their mere relationship that they are as fit to accomplish great things as their forefathers were, they fall into an error which may be fatal to themselves and others. They must first make sure that they possess the mental and moral qualities by which their ancestors became so renowned. It is not enough to be bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh unless they partake of their spirit. The children of the great and good must be great and good themselves if they would do the great deeds of their fathers. If they venture upon great enterprises, looking for success to their descent from some hero of the past, they will find that it will avail them nothing to bear his name if they lack his courage, his self-denial, his fortitude and his faith. Priests bearing the ark of God had in the past history of Israel made a way by which they had advanced to glorious victory. There had been a memorable day in their history when "*as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, that the waters were cut off and the people passed over right against Jericho*" (Josh. iii. 16). And perhaps both priests and people hoped for some such interposition of God on the present occasion. But then the ark was borne by men who had faith in God—the feet of those by whose touch under God Jordan was driven back, were *cleaner feet* that those of Hophni and Phinehas. The priests who stood firm in the midst of Jordan—the first to descend into its bed and the last to leave it—had confidence in the living God, and their courage and faith spread itself throughout all the ranks of Israel, and inspired them with a like faith and courage. But although the same ark of God was in the midst of Israel to-day it was borne upon the shoulders of men who had only a bodily kinship to their ancestors, and who, instead of inciting the people to confide in the God of their fathers, had brought His name and His worship into contempt. It was an act of the highest presumption on their part to bring the ark of God into the field, knowing, as they did, that though they belonged to a priestly family, they had none of the qualifications for the priestly office. If they relied upon their relationship to the victors of the past they were soon to become examples to all succeeding ages of the futility of such a reliance.

VI. When superstition is the foundation of joy, the joy will soon be turned into sorrow. It is superstition to attach any value to the symbol when that

which makes the symbol worth anything has departed. The human body is a goodly and precious object, while it is tenanted by a living soul; but without the soul it is only dead matter. So is it with a symbol, and that which it signifies. When that which it symbolises is gone it is as a body without life. The ark was intended to be a sign to the Israelites of the presence in their midst of the invisible God. The mercy seat, upon which the blood of atonement had been sprinkled, and over which the glory of God had been visibly manifested, had been a token of the favour of Him to whom Israel had bound themselves to render obedience. But the covenant had been broken by their faithlessness, and the presence in their midst of the symbol of what had for a time ceased to exist, was of as little worth as the presence of a corpse in the place of a living man. To attach any value to it was an act of ignorant superstition, and the hope founded upon such a basis must end in disappointment. "When the ark of the covenant came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout" (ver. 5), but their triumph was of short duration because it was founded upon a superstition. Joy springing from such a source only increases the bitterness of the disappointment when the true state of things is revealed, and men should look well to the foundation of their hope and joy and see that it is founded upon the truth of God, or the false hope will be but as the lightning flash which is gone in the twinkling of an eye, and makes the darkness all around seem deeper than it was before. The shout that now rang through the Hebrew camp was a terrible contrast to the cry of despair that ran through the host when the ark of God was taken.

VII. Men will fight as valiantly for a bad cause as for a good one. The Philistines fought as valiantly as the Israelites (ver. 10). History furnishes us with abundant testimony to the fact that courage is born of error as well as of truth. He who believes a lie may contend for it as valiantly as he who fights for the very truth of God. The Israelites, fallen as they were, had more of right and truth on their side than their enemies had, yet the Philistines were at least as bold and brave as they were. Though the heathen believed that they were opposed by the mighty gods that smote the Egyptians, they resolved to quit themselves like men, and fight even unto death rather than become servants to the Hebrews. And the issue of the battle shows that their resolution did not falter. The courage of the battle-field is to a large degree of an animal nature, hence the savage will stand and die at his post with as much fortitude as the citizen soldier, and he who fights without knowing what he fights for, or for the worst of causes, will be as brave as he who fights from the purest and most patriotic motives. No men ever fought in a more unjust cause than the Spaniards who sought to crush the liberties of the Netherlanders, and yet their bravery was on many occasions equal to that of their opponents, who were engaged in the holiest of all struggles—the struggle for religious freedom.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 3. **The voice of many of us now is like to the voice of the Jews in the time of their distress.** "Bring us the ark," say they, "that it may save us," when, alas, they were destroyed by the Philistines for all their ark. So thou, reader, when conscience frighteth thee, or death comes nigh thee, probably speakest in thine heart, Come, bring me the ark that may save me, bring me the sacrament that shall save me; thou runnest to thy baptism, to thy sabbath, to privileges, and thence concludest that thou canst not be condemned; when, alas, thou mayest go to hell fire for all thy font-water, and to eternal torments, though thou hast often been at the Lord's table (Matt. vii. 22). Baptismal water is not the laver of regeneration. Many sit at

the Lord's table which do not taste of His supper. . . . . Spiritual privileges always commend God to us, but not us to God.—*Swinnock.*

"Trust ye not in lying words," says the prophet (Jer. vii. 4), "saying, The temple of the Lord;" but if ye thoroughly amend your ways, "then will I cause you to dwell in this place for ever and ever" (ver. 7). It is observable that God there refers to this history, and says, "Go ye now to *Shiloh*, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people. Probably David remembered it, when he refused to allow the ark to be carried with him in his retreat before Absalom out of Jerusalem (2 Sam. xv. 25).—*Wordsworth.*

As Israel became acted on by the system which prevailed under Eli, superstition succeeded to the fear of God. Now superstition is the refuge of the conscience when it has lost the sense of God's personal presence. You may measure by its prevalence the absence of God from men's hearts. It will be natural that in an age of mere outward respect for religion, superstition should be advancing and regaining its hold.—*Alford.*

It will often happen that those who are least affected by the overwhelming sense of God's abiding presence with His Church, the authority of her ministry and the power of her ordinances, will be found, and that too because of their little inward affection, most forward on all occasions to talk about, and in argument to contend for, the high privileges with which Christ has endowed her. Such men, like the Israelites when defeated by the Philistines, in the hope of victory scruple not at every conflict with their enemies to lay bare, as it were, the veiled glories of the tabernacle, and at their own will to bring forth the ark of the covenant, as if that alone were wanting to strike dismay into the opposing ranks and ensure success. . . . . But to make war in the name of the Lord against others only, and not against our own sins and iniquities, is to pollute the name of God and cause His offering to be abhorred.—*Bishop Fulford.*

Ver. 4. Jehovah as covenant-God is more properly designated in a two-fold manner, corresponding to the situation, in which the Israelites desire His *Almighty help*, which they think to be externally connected with the ark. As Jehovah *Sabbaoth* (Lord of Hosts), He is the Almighty ruler and commander of the heavenly powers. As Jehovah who "dwells above the cherubim," He is the living God, the God of the completest fulness of power and life, who reveals Himself on *earth* in His glory, exaltedness, and dominion over all the fulness of the life which has been called into being by Him as Creator. This designation of God is never found except in relation to the ark, which is conceived of as the *throne* of the covenant-God, who dwells as King in the midst of His people. The *cherubim* are not representatives of the heavenly powers, since they are, as to form, made up of elements of the *living, animate, earthly* creation which culminates in man. Representing this, they set forth, in their position on the ark, the ruling might and majesty of the Living God, as it is revealed over the manifoldness of the highest and completest life of the animate creation. In these two designations of God, then, reference is had to the *glory and dominion of God*, which embraces and high exceeds all creaturely life in *heaven* and on *earth*, and whose saving interposition the Israelites made dependent on the presence of the ark. In sharpest contrast to this indication of God's loftiness and majesty, stands the mention of the two priests, Hophni and Phinehas, whose worthlessness has been before set forth, and who represent the whole of the moral corruption and sham religious life of the people.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 5. When the ark was brought into the host, though with mean and wicked attendance, Israel doth, as it were, fill the heaven and shake the earth with shouts as if the ark and

victory were no less inseparable than they and their sins. Even the lewdest men will be looking for favour from that God whom they cared not to displease, contrary to the conscience of their deservings; presumption doth the same in wicked men which faith doth in the holiest. Those that regarded not the God of the ark think themselves safe and happy in the ark of God. Vain men are transported with a confidence in the outside of religion, not regarding the substance and soul of it, which only can give them true peace.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 9. Observe the Philistines crying, "God is come into the camp; woe unto us!" etc. Yet they settle, hearten, harden themselves to fight against Him. . . . . Refractory and perverse affections make a man frantic. There may be a sober knowledge, that the patient may say, "I see better things," and a faith (but such as is incident to devils) "I allow of them," but where the whole man is tyrannised over by the regent-house of irrefragable affects, he concludes his course with, "I follow the worse."—*T. Adams.*

Ver. 10. It is just the same now, when we take merely a historical Christ outside us for our Redeemer. He must prove His help chiefly internally by His Holy Spirit, to redeem us out of the hands of the Philistines; though externally He must not be thrown into the shade, as accomplishing our justification. If we had not Christ, we could never stand. But if we have Him in no other way than merely without us, and under us, if we only preach about Him, teach, hear, read, talk, discuss, and dispute about Him, take His name into our mouth, but will not let Him work and show His power in us, He will no more help us than the ark helped the Israelites. —*Berlenberger Bible.*

It is one of the weightiest laws in the kingdom of God, that when His people, who profess His name, do not show covenant fidelity in faith and obedience, but, under cover of merely external piety, serve Him in appearance only, being in heart and life far from Him, He gives them up for punishment to the world, before which they have not magnified the honour of His name, but have covered it with reproach.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 11. "*The ark of God was taken.*" Why did God permit this? I. In order to show that His presence had forsaken Israel, because they had forsaken Him. II. In order to show that visible ordinances of religion only profit those who have the spirit of religion within them. III. In order to show that though men are bound to use the means of grace which God has instituted for the conveyance of His blessings to them, yet God's presence and working are not tied to those means. He can act without them.—*Wordsworth.*

Instead of bewailing a nation's sins, and preaching public repentance and interceding for mercy from a forgiving God, Hophni and Phinehas had joined in the superstitious desire to take the ark into the field of battle, and they met with a bloody and ignominous death as the price of their perilous temerity and open profanity. It is ever dangerous for ministers of religion to mix in the strife of war. Not that it is foreign to their duty to become pastors of soldiers—that is a duty incumbent upon them. . . . . But it ill becomes the minister of peace to mix in the clang of arms. It was an evil day for Hophni and Phinehas when they took the ark of the covenant from Shiloh, and sought to work on the fanaticism of the people by unveiling the Holiest of all. They provoked the judgment which shed their blood. It was an evil day for Zwingle when he left his chaplain's post to wear a helmet, a sword, and a battle-axe: covered with wounds, insulted, killed, he lay under a tree at Cappel; not yet forty-eight years of age, his body cut and burned, and his ashes driven to the winds. "He had wielded an arm that God had forbidden," says D'Aubigné; "the helmet had covered

his head, and he had grasped the halberd. His more devoted friends were themselves astonished, and exclaimed, 'We knew not what to say—a bishop in arms.' The bolt had furrowed the cloud, the blow had reached the reformer, and his body was no more than a handful of dust in the palm of a soldier."—*Steele.*

The ark of God was taken. These words record the most disastrous event that had till then befallen the children of Israel. . . . Even in the worst times, when the revolt might seem universal, there were always some, however few, who constituted the Church, the true Israel, who never bowed the knee to a false god; and to all such, Shiloh, with the tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering, and the ark of the covenant, would be a precious spot, towards which their thoughts would turn in every season of distress and disaster. . . . . So long as there was no visible intimation that God had deserted Shiloh, true believers in Israel would still cherish the hope that, however severe might be the judgments with which God visited them, He had not finally given them up. . . . But now what could every thoughtful man in Israel conclude, but that all the wonderful deliverances in connection with the ark of which their fathers had told them, were at an end? . . . The state of the people of God at the time here referred to, as well as the immediate cause of their being brought into that state, reminds us of another period in which the Church must have been in great darkness and perplexity. I refer to the time when our Lord was delivered into the hands of ungodly men, when He was crucified, and remained for a time under the power of death. I do not say that the one is designedly typical of the other. But we know that the ark was in various respects a remarkable type of Christ, and the passage before us naturally suggests, at least, his humiliation and death.—*B. Gordon.*

Rather than God will humour superstition in Israelites, he will suffer His own ark to fall into the hands of Philistines: rather will He seem to slacken His hand of protection, than He will be thought to have His hands bound by a formal mis-confidence. The slaughter of the Israelites was no plague to this; it was a greater plague rather to them that should survive and behold it. The two sons of Eli, who had helped to corrupt their brethren, die by the hand of the uncircumcised, and are now too late separated from the ark of God by Philistines, who should have been before separated by their father; they had formerly lived to bring God's altar into contempt, and now live to carry His ark into captivity.—*Bishop Hall.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.— Verses 12—22.

The Death of Eli.

I. All God's promises become histories. In the natural world there is promise of what shall be, and in due time there is the history of its having been. The green blade of spring is a promise of the harvest that is by and by a fact in the history of the world. The cloud no bigger than a man's hand upon the horizon is the promise of the storm that may be presently set down in the catalogue of destructive visitations that have devastated the earth. In the days of Noah a promise of judgment hung over the people of his day for one hundred and twenty years. So long was it before the cloud burst that the terror which was perhaps aroused at the first announcement of its appearance passed away long before the storm burst. But it came, and the flood is now a fact in the history of the world. God had foretold the judgment which is described in this chapter some years before. If the message which had been sent to the house of Eli had ever caused the hearts of Hophni and Phinehas to quake, the delay in the

execution of the sentence had probably only hardened them in their sin, and perhaps even Eli himself might have begun to hope that it would not be so terrible as it had seemed to him at first. But on this memorable day God gave a demonstration to all coming ages that all His promises, whether of judgment or mercy, will one day become facts in the history of the universe. A promise was made to Isaiah concerning the deliverance of his nation from Babylon long before it went into captivity, but both captivity and deliverance, with all the circumstances foretold concerning the latter in Isaiah xlv., have long ago become well-known historic facts. The great fact in which all history centres—the incarnation of the Son of God—was for ages only a promise. The dim outline given to our first parents in Eden was like the tiny germ bursting from the seed which grew into the blade and ear as the ages rolled, until the promise became the great historic event of the world. And there are promises now waiting to become histories, and they will as surely have their fulfilment as those that have gone before. What has been is a pledge of what will be. Men say, concerning Christ's second advent, "Where is the promise of His coming?" But that promise of the Lord will one day as surely be a fact of past history as those that have gone before.

II. The effects produced by the fulfilment of this promise of judgment. There was not a family in the land who was not smitten with a sense of national calamity. A stab at the heart sends a pain through all the frame, the extremities of the body feel a blow aimed at the seat of life. In countries where the army is drawn from the fields and workshops of the people, the strength of the nation is often found gathered upon the battle-field, and a defeat there is a blow at its very heart and sends a thrill of anguish into every home. Such was the nature of the blow which Israel had now sustained, and the entire body of the nation felt the shock. Wherever there was a child of Abraham the news of the defeat pierced him through like a stab of cold steel. But the calamity was more intensely felt by some households than by others. In any time of national calamity the leaders of the nation have to bear a larger portion of the sorrow than the masses. They lose more in every way. They have more to lose—more in substance—more in honour; as their position has been higher, their fall is greater, and as more responsibility has rested upon them, so their disgrace is heavier. Although all the families of Israel suffered on this day none suffered so much as the house of Eli. Even if it had not been the execution of a special judgment upon them, their position would have made them the greatest sufferers, but the consciousness that the calamity was mainly due to the sins of their house intensified a thousand-fold the severity of the blow. The effect that the news had upon the aged high-priest shows how severely he felt it. In felling an aged oak many a stroke of the hatchet may be dealt before there is any sign of its fall, but at length the woodman gathers all his strength for a final stroke, which, following upon all that have gone before, lays it even with the ground. So it is with men and the strokes of adverse providence—they stand upright after having received many a heavy blow, but one may come at last which, finding their courage and patience weakened by the trials of the past, crushes them altogether. Job bore up manfully against repeated and heavy blows, but at last a stroke fell which laid even this brave and patient man prostrate like a fallen tree. Eli had seen many a sad day in the course of a life which covered nearly a century, but he had never seen a day like this. Even now he bore calmly the news of Israel's defeat, and even that of the death of his sons, but the tidings that the ark of God was taken was too much to bear and live—this stroke killed him.

III. Calamity often reveals excellencies which are hidden in prosperity. There are many men in the Church of God living in ease and comfort who do

not seem to possess any extraordinary heroism. But very often such men, under circumstances of special trial, reveal a nobility of character that men never knew before that they possessed. Like spices, they must be crushed before they yield their fragrance. What is recorded of the life of Eli does not leave the impression that he was a very exalted character; but the fact that it was the loss of the ark of God that killed him, and not the news of his own personal bereavement, shows that there was much latent patriotism in him, notwithstanding his grave shortcomings. We should never have known how much he really prized the hallowed tokens of God's covenant-relation to Israel if this calamity had not befallen him. The thought that God had departed from his people broke his heart before he fell and broke his neck. It is the same with his daughter-in-law. We should never have known of this woman's piety if this blow had not fallen upon her. It was not the death of her father, or of her husband, that made her refuse to be comforted and to go down to the grave with *Ichabod* upon her lips, but "*she said, The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken.*"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 13. There be four reasons why the people of God are so much troubled when the ark of God is in danger. **I. Because of the great love they bear to it.** As "God loved the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Psalm lxxxvii. 2), so the people of God love the ordinances of God, and the faithful ministers of Christ. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth" (Psalm xxvi. 8). Now love stirreth up the affections, as young Cresus, though he were dumb, yet seeing his father like to be killed, cried out "Do not kill my father!" Such is the love of the saints of God to the ark; they cannot but tremble when they see the ark in danger, and for Sion's sake they cannot hold their peace, and they cannot be silent until the Lord make the righteousness thereof go out like brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. **II. Because of the interest they have in the ark of God.** Interest stirreth up affection as when another man's house is on fire; as you had a lamentable and sad providence this last week, and it is not to be forgotten how suddenly in all our feastings may God dash all our mirth. Now consider, how were they affected that had an interest in those that were burned; so the people of God have an interest in the ark. God is the haven of a child of God, his portion and inheritance, and when God begins to forsake them they cannot but be troubled. The ordinances of God are the jewels of a Christian and the treasure of a Christian, and the loss of them cannot but trouble them. **III. Because of the mischiefs that come upon a nation when the ark is lost.** Woe be to that nation when the ark is gone. For when the ark of God is taken *then the ways of Zion mourn, and none come to her solemn assemblies.* That is matter of sadness. *Then the ministers of Christ are driven into corners.* This is matter of heart-trembling. *Then the souls of men are in danger.* There is cause of sadness. *Then do the enemies of God blaspheme, and then is Jesus Christ trampled under foot.* **IV. Because of their accessariness to the losing of the ark.** And this was that which made Eli so much troubled, because he knew that for his sin God suffered the ark to be taken. And there is none of us so holy but our consciences must accuse us. We have done something that might cause God to take the ark from us.—*E. Calamy*, 1662.

Ver. 22. With the surrender of the earthly throne of His glory the Lord appeared to have abolished His

covenant of grace with Israel; for the ark, with the tables of the law and the capporeth, was the visible pledge of the covenant of grace which Jehovah had made with Israel.—*Keil.*

The glory is departed from Israel—so it seemed in the eyes of men. But with God there is "no variableness or shadow of turning" (Jas. i. 17); and in that dark night of sorrow to the Hebrew Church and nation His glory shone forth most brightly. There is no Ichabod to God. His sovereign power and Divine independence were seen to work more gloriously and graciously even when the visible Church appeared to be overthrown. . . . . He inaugurated a new era in Samuel, and prepared the way for the Gospel. He showed that the Aaronical priesthood was only parenthetical and provisional; that the Levitical ordinances were not necessary to God's gracious dealings with His people; that they were shadows which would one day pass away; that they were like a scaffold for building up a house—the Church of Christ. . . . . God thus gave a prophetic foreshadowing of what was more fully displayed to the world when the material temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the universal Church of Christ was raised up in its stead.—*Wordsworth.*

The union of the heart with God in the deepest foundation of its being reveals itself in times of great misfortune and suffering in this, that the sorrow and mourning is not restricted to the loss of earthly human possessions, but directs itself chiefly to the loss and lack of God's gracious presence, and thus shows that for the inner life the glory of God and blessedness in communion with Him is become the highest good. So here, in this refraining from grief over the loss of what to the flesh was the nearest and dearest, and in the outspoken sorrow only over the violence done to God's honour and the contempt cast on His name, is verified the Lord's word, "He who forsaketh not father or mother, or brother, etc., is not worthy of me." *Lange's Commentary.*

What cares she for a posterity which should want the ark? What cares she for a son come into the world of Israel when God was gone from it? And how willingly doth she depart from them, from whom God was departed! *Bishop Hall.*

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Ashdod.**" One of the five Philistine satraples about thirty-two miles north of Gaza, and about a mile from the sea. It is now the little village of Esdûd.

Ver. 2. "**Dagon.**" One of the chief Philistine deities. "With regard to the image of Dagon, compounded of a man and fish, *i.e.*, of a human body with head and hands, and a fish's tail, see Stark's *Gaza* and Layard's *Nineveh*, where there is a bas-relief from Khorsabad, in which 'a figure is seen swimming in the sea, with the upper part of the body resembling a bearded man, wearing the ordinary conical tiara of royalty, adorned with elephant's tusks, and the lower part resembling the body of a fish.' (*Starke.*) As the bas-relief represents (according to Layard) the war of an Assyrian king with the inhabitants of the coasts of Syria, most probably of Sargon, who had to carry on a long conflict with the Philistian towns, more especially with Ashdod, there can hardly be any doubt that we have a representation of the Philistian Dagon here. This deity was a personification of the generative and vivifying principle of nature for which the fish, with its innumerable multiplication, was specially adapted, and set forth the Giver of all earthly good." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 4. "The word *were* is not in the original, and would be better omitted; the head and palms of Dagon, being cut off, were lying on the threshold. Here was the miracle, and it was very significant. It was done by the Divine power. The head and palms of Dagon, the chiefest of his members, the emblems of his strength, were lopped off." (*Wordsworth.*) "**Only the stump,**" etc. Literally, "only Dagon, the fish (from *dag*, a fish), the ignoblest part, was left." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 5. "**Therefore neither the priests—tread on the threshold,**" etc. "Cf. Zeph. i. 9. 'On the same day will I punish all those that leap on (or over) the threshold.' No doubt this phrase was intended (perhaps with some irony) to describe the worshippers of the Philistian Dagon." *(Hobson.)*

Ver. 6. "**He destroyed them.**" From chap. vi. 4, 5, 11, 18, where, besides the votive offering referring to the bodily disease, a second, the golden mice, is expressly mentioned, it is clear that, in addition to the corporal plague, another, a land-plague, had fallen on the Philistines. "He destroyed them" (like "destruction" or "desolation," in Mic. vi. 13, used of persons) denotes a wasting of the land, that is, of the produce of the fields, as the support of human life, by mice which "destroy the land" (chap. vi. 5). *(Erdmann.)* "We must go to the East for parallels to these ancient plagues. A parallel to this plague of mice is furnished in the recent history of Ceylon. In 1848, the coffee-crop of that fertile island was utterly destroyed by mice, and the people, losing their staple harvest, were reduced to the most terrible misery and want." *(S. Cox.)* "**Emerods.**" "The disease we call bleeding piles," a disease very common in Eastern lands, where the extreme heat induces indisposition to exercise, and the liver is very apt to grow sluggish and weak. The word is vernacular English for the Greek compound from which we derive the technical medical terms, "hemorrhoids, hemorrhage," which designate a flow of blood. *(S. Cox.)* "The heathen generally regarded diseases affecting the secret parts of the body as punishments from the gods for trespasses committed against themselves." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver 8. "**Let the ark of the God of Israel,**" etc. The princes of the Philistines probably imagined that the calamity which the Ashdodites attributed to the ark of God, either did not proceed from the ark, *i.e.*, from the God of Israel, or if actually connected with its presence, simply arose from the fact that the city itself was hateful to the God of the Israelites, or that the Dagon of Ashdod was weaker than the Jehovah of Israel; they therefore resolved to let the ark be taken to Gath in order to pacify the Ashdodites." *(Keil.)* "**Gath.**" Also one of the five Philistian satrapies. Its site is not accurately known, but it is generally identified with the modern *Tell-es-Sáfieh*, 10 miles east of Ashdod, and about the same distance S. by E. of Ekron. *(See Smith's Biblical Dictionary.)*

Ver. 10. "**Ekron.**" Another of the princely cities, now *Akir*.

Ver. 12. "**The cry of the city went up to heaven.**" "The disease is attended with acute pain" *(Jamieson)*.

Note.—This chapter, with the following, strikingly illustrates the non-missionary character of the old dispensation. For centuries the Israelites were near neighbours of the Philistines, and had some acquaintance with their political and religious institutions. Yet the Philistines had at this time only a garbled and distorted account (ch. iv. 8) of the history of the Israelites, derived probably from tradition, and seemingly no particular knowledge of their religion, nor did the Israelites ever attempt, though they were in the times of Samson and David in close connection with Philistia, to carry thither a knowledge of what they yet believed to be the only true religion. This religious isolation was no doubt a part of the Divine plan for the development of the theocratic kingdom, guarding it against the taints of idolatry, and permitting the chosen people thoroughly to apprehend and appropriate the truth which was then to go from them to all the world. But if we look for the natural causes which produced this isolation in ancient times, we shall find one in the narrowness of civilisation of ancient times, where the absence of means of social and literary communication fostered mutual ignorance and made sympathy almost impossible, and another in the peculiarly national local nature of the religion of Israel, with its central sanctuary and its whole system grounded in the past history of the nation, presenting thus great obstacles to a foreigner who wished to become a worshipper of Jehovah. *(Amer. Transr. of Lange's Commentary).*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 1–5.

The Fall of Dagon.

I. God works in silence and in secret against false systems of religion to give men a public and sudden proof of their folly. Dagon's downfall took place in the secrecy of the night: when daylight came, his destruction was made apparent. God's kingdom of nature, and His kingdom of grace, are alike in this, that neither "come with observation" (Luke xvii. 20). All the winter nature seems to be at a standstill, but all the time secret preparation is going on beneath the ground and within the plants for the outburst of life and beauty in

the spring. And in His spiritual kingdom there have often been times and seasons in which there has seemed to be hardly any true religious life left in the world, when solitary believers in God here and there have been ready to exclaim with the prophet of old, "*I, even I only, am left*" (1 Kings xix. 14). But it has often been found that such seasons of darkness have been followed by a day in which the truth of God has won great victories in the hearts of men, giving proof that His spirit has been, during all the long night, working silently and secretly in men's hearts. So it was before the downfall of Paganism after the coming of Christ, and before the overthrow of the Papal tyranny at the time of the Reformation. When the pious Israelite lay down that night and thought of the sacred ark of the covenant in the house of Dagon, he must have been ready to exclaim with the dying wife of Phinehas, "The glory is departed from Israel." But God at that very hour was working in secret, and was dealing a heavy blow at the idolatry of the Philistines.

II. Even miraculous evidence does not always suffice to bring men to acknowledge God. Experience of the fallacy of the advice of a quack is the surest way, we think, to lead men to put faith in the advice of a skilful physician; and when men have had the powerlessness of the gods whom they worship proved to them by unmistakable evidence, we should expect them to be ready to embrace a religion based upon supernatural evidence if history and experience did not testify to the contrary. Dagon testified by his first fall that "an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. viii. 4). But it brought no conviction into the minds of the Philistine priests. They "set him in his place again." His second fall upon the threshold seemed to tell them that he was only fit to be *trodden under foot*, yet they venerated the spot upon which he fell. But the Philistines were not more unwilling to receive evidence of the truth than the majority of mankind. Israel was formed into a nation by miraculous power, and sustained miraculously for forty years, and over and over again were delivered from their distresses by miraculous interposition, yet God's testimony concerning them is, "Ephraim is joined unto idols" (Hosea iv. 17). The Son of God Himself proved that He came from the Father by His "mighty works," but they made no impression upon the mass of the Jewish people. A delusion *proved* is not a delusion *abandoned*. And Our Lord Himself tells us the reason why. It is because "men *love* darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil" (John iii. 19).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 1-5. Dagon before the ark, or *heathenism conquered at the feet of the living God.* 1. In the domain of its power—its own abode (verses 1, 2). 2. Through the secret demonstration of the power of the Lord (verses 3, 4). 3. Amid the destruction of its power and glory—the *face*, as a sign of its worthless glory and vain beauty, struck down to the earth; the *head* also, as the seat of the wisdom which is alienated from God, and opposed to God; the *hands*, as a symbol of the powers of darkness which work therein, cut off (verses 3-5). *The fall of heathenism.* 1. It is *thrown down* before the power of God, manifesting Himself as present in His *Word* (the law and testimony in the ark). 2. Its power *broken* and *destroyed* through the secretly working power of the Spirit of God. 3. Ever a more and more glorious *revelation* of the power of God, which casts down heathenism in the light of the day of salvation.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Where God comes with His ark and with His testimony, there He smites the idols to the ground; idolatry must fall where His gospel finds a place.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

If men did not mistake God, they

could not arise to such heights of impiety; the acts of His just judgments are imputed to impotence. Dagon had never so great a day, so many sacrifices, as now that he seems to take the God of Israel prisoner. Where should the captive be bestowed, but in custody of the victor? It is not love, but insultation, that lodges the ark close beside Dagon. What a spectacle was this, to see uncircumcised Philistines laying their profane hands on the testimony of God's presence! to see the glorious mercy-seat under the roof of an idol! to see the two cherubims spreading their wings under a false god! O the deep and holy wisdom of the Almighty, which over-reaches all the finite conceits of His creatures, who, while He seems most to neglect Himself, fetches about most glory to His own name! He winks and sits still on purpose to see what men would do, and is content to suffer indignity from His creature for a time, that He may be everlastingly magnified in His justice and power: that honour pleaseth God and men best, which is raised out of contempt. . . . . If the Israelites put confidence in the ark, can we marvel that the Philistines did put confidence in that power, which, as they thought, had conquered the ark? The less is ever subject unto the greater; what could they now think, but that heaven and earth were theirs? Security and presumption attend ever at the threshold of ruin. God will let them sleep in this confidence; in the morning they shall find how vainly they have dreamed! Now they begin to find they have but gloried in their own plague, and overthrown nothing but their own peace. . . . . Dagon hath a house, when God hath but a tabernacle; it is no measuring of religion by outward glory.—*Bishop Hall.*

The foolish Philistines thought that the same house could hold both the ark and Dagon, as if an insensible statue were a fit companion for the living God. In the morning they come to thank Dagon for the victory, and to fall down before him before whom they thought the God of Israel was fallen; and lo! now they find the keeper flat on his face before the prisoner. Had they formerly, of their own accord, with awful reverence, laid him in this posture of a humble prostration, yet God would not have brooked the indignity of such an entertainment. But seeing they durst set up their idol cheek by cheek with their Maker, let them go read their folly in the temple floor, and confess that He who did cast their god so low, could cast them lower. Such a shame doth the Lord owe all them which will be making matches betwixt Him and Belial. Yet they consider not, How should this god raise us who is not able to stand or rise himself? Strange they must confess it, that whereas Dagon was wont to stand, and themselves to fall down; now Dagon was fallen down, and themselves stood, and must help up with their own god. Yea, their god seems to worship them on his face, and to crave that succour from them which he was never able to give them. Yet in his place they set him again, and now lift up those hands to him which helped to lift him up and prostrate those faces to him before whom he lay prostrate. So can idolatry turn men into the stocks and stones which they worship: "*They that make them are like unto them.*" But will the Lord put it up thus? No, the next fall shall burst it to pieces; that they may sensibly perceive how God scorns a competitor, and that there is no agreement betwixt Him and idols. Now, what is the difference between the Philistines and the Papists? The Philistines would set God in the temple of idols; the Papists would set idols in the temple of God. Both agree in this, that they would make God and idols agree together.—*T. Adams.*

Ver. 3. Because you have broken your purpose, do not allow it to go unmended. Even the heathen, with so base a conception of divinity as Dagon was, when Dagon fell to the ground, lifted him up again and put him in his place. When, not your idol, but your bright ideal, falls to the ground, though

its head and its feet be broken, lift it up and put it in its place again. Because you have broken faith and fealty to that which you meant to be, and meant to do, it is no reason why you should not swear again, and again go forward.—*Beecher.*

Ver. 4. *The prevalence of idolatry in the heart of man.* Dagon has still his temple there. The great idolatry of mankind is *self.* . . . Christ is the true ark of the covenant, and when He takes possession of the temple of man's heart, then the Dagon of the place is dethroned; it loses its head and hands, its carnal wisdom and carnal works, at the very threshold of the sanctuary, but still the *stump* is left; however powerful the principle of indwelling grace may be, there is still the remnant of indwelling sin. And while we might unfeignedly desire that even the stump of sin and self were gone, we may well be thankful if no more be left. . . . We know not whether the priests of Dagon erected another idol upon the stump of the broken one; but this we know, that many idols are contending for the throne of man's heart, and when one Dagon is deposed, he leaves his stump upon which another is quickly raised. But the same Almighty grace which cast down one shall triumph over all. The covenant ensures the death of sin, the life of grace, and the crown of glory, and when grace has brought you to glory you will rejoice to all eternity, that "only the stump of Dagon was left."—*Fenn.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—12.

THE JUDGMENTS UPON THE PHILISTINES.

I. When judgment begins with the people of God it is certain to extend to the ungodly. If a human king is just he will visit his own family with punishment if they break the laws of his kingdom. But the very fact that he does so is a pledge that he will not spare the rest of his subjects if they are found guilty. Judgment will begin where transgression ought, least of all, to appear, and where, if it appear, it ought to be least tolerated; but should the same sins be committed by others, it may be regarded as certain that it will extend to them also. God deals with men as a good king and father deals with his children. He will certainly inflict chastisement upon those who are most nearly related to Him by moral character, but He will not spare those who are utterly ungodly. God's ancient people, at this period in their history, needed chastisement, and they had it. He avenged the dishonour which had been done to His name by those whom He "had nourished and brought up" as His children (Isa. i. 2) by a heavy visitation. But He did not spare the more guilty Canaanites. When judgment "begins at the house of God," the question forces itself upon the mind, "Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. iv. 17, 18).

II. When the ungodly have been used as instruments of Divine chastisement, they are chastened themselves to teach them that they were not chosen for their moral excellence. Sometimes delay takes place in the execution of a criminal, not because there is any reason to show him favour, but that he may be used to bring others to justice. When he has been used for this purpose he finds that the same law which convicts them punishes him also. It is often so in the righteous government of God. He selected Nebuchadnezzar to be His battle-axe when Israel needed chastisement, but he was but a reprieved criminal, and when he had fulfilled the Divine purpose he was made to feel that it was so. Here the Philistines were made the instruments of God's judgment upon His people, but they soon found that they had not been selected for this work because they were held in favour by Jehovah. The hand of God upon

them soon taught them that they also were under His displeasure—that God had, in the language of the prophet, taken *"the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of His fury, and put it into the hand of them that afflicted Israel"* (Isa. li. 22, 23).

III. There may be an admission that God has smitten without true repentance. The Philistines confessed that the hand of Jehovah was sore upon them, and upon their god, but it led to no investigation into His claims to their homage—to no change in their disposition towards Him. Pharaoh acknowledged that "the Lord was righteous, and that he and his people were wicked" (Exod. ix. 27), but his admission had no effect upon his conduct. Saul admitted that God had forsaken him, and was visiting him for his sin, but he turned not to Him who had smitten him, but, in direct opposition to the Divine command, sought counsel of a witch. Many men in every age are compelled to acknowledge that God is visiting them, yet they will not turn to Him in repentance. They may cry to God in their despair, but they give evidence that it is not sin that troubles them, but the punishment of sin. Like the Philistines, they would be rid of their suffering, but they are not willing to give up their Dagons, and to give glory and render obedience to the Lord of hosts.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 6. The hand of the Almighty, which moved them not in falling on their god, falls now nearer on their persons, and strikes them in their bodies which would not feel themselves stricken in their idol. Pain shall humble them, when shame cannot.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 7. They should have rather parted with their sins than with the ark, and have said unto their sins "Get thee hence," as Isa. xxx. 22. What have we to do any more with Dagon who cannot save himself, much less us, from the Divine vengeance? Wicked men are glad upon all occasions to be rid of God and His ark, His ordinances, which they, Philistine-like, have rather as prisoners than as privileges.—*Trapp.*

The emerods were not a disease beyond the compass of natural causes; neither was it hard for the wiser sort to give a reason of their complaint; yet they ascribe it to the hand of God: the knowledge and operation of secondary causes should be no prejudice to the first. They are worse than the Philistines who, when they see the means, do not acknowledge their first Mover, whose active just power is no less seen in employing ordinary means than in raising up extraordinary; neither doth He less smite by a common fever, than by an avenging angel.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 10. The struggles of the Philistines against Jehovah tended only to bring the ark nearer to its own home, and to bring more evils on its enemies. The sufferings of Ekron were worse than those of Ashdod, and the sufferings of Gath were more grievous than those of Ekron. So all the assaults of the enemies of the faith against the ark of Christ's church will serve only to bring her nearer to her heavenly and eternal home.—*Wordsworth.*

Thus they send the plague of God up and down to their neighbours. Wicked men use to draw others into partnership of their condemnation.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 11. When man's heart *will* not give up its worthless idols, though God's hand draw it to Himself by affliction and suffering, then the distance between him and the God that offers to be with him becomes greater in proportion to the severity and painfulness of the suffering felt by the soul alienated from God and devoted to idolatry. We shall at last desire to

be entirely away from God, as the Philistines at last resolved to carry the ark over the border, that they might have nothing more to do with the God of Israel, while, on the contrary, the ark should have warned them to give glory to the God of Israel, who had so unmistakably and gloriously revealed Himself to them.—*Lange's Commentary.*

God knows how to bring the stubbornest enemy on his knees, and make him do that out of fear which His best child would do out of love or duty. . . . It is happy that God hath such store of plagues and thunderbolts for the wicked: if He had not a fire of judgment, wherewith iron hearts might be made flexible, He would want obedience, and the world peace.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 12. The cry that ascends *to heaven* over sufferings and afflictions that are the consequences of wickedness, is by no means a sign that need teaches prayer; it may be made wholly from a heathen point of view. The cry that penetrates *into heaven* is "*Against thee* have I sinned," and is the expression of an upright, earnest penitence, which is awakened in the heart by the chastisement of God's hand.—*Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Country,**" literally the *field.* It probably signifies the *cultivated plain.*

Ver. 2. "**Diviners.**" "That is, the organs of the Deity, who reveal His counsel and will through the mantic art, and whose decision is final. After it had been determined in the council of the *princes* (chap. v. 11) to send back the ark to the Israelites, the *priests* and *soothsayers* are to tell *how* it shall be sent back." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 3. "**Trespass-offering.**" *Asham,* literally *guilt,* then a gift presented as compensation for a fault. The gifts appointed by the Philistines as an *asham* were to serve as compensation and satisfaction to be rendered to the God of Israel for the robbery committed upon Him by the removal of the ark, and were therefore called *asham,* though in their nature they were only expiatory offerings" *(Keil).*

Ver. 4. "**Five golden mice,**" etc. "It was a prevalent custom in heathen antiquity to make offerings to the gods expressive of the particular mercy received. Those saved from shipwreck offered pictures of the shipwreck in the temple of Isis; slaves and captives, in gratitude for the recovery of their liberty, offered chains to the Lares; retired gladiators, their arms to Hercules; and in the fifth century a custom prevailed among Christians of offering in their churches gold or silver hands, feet, etc., in return for cures effected in those members. . . . . A similar custom still prevails among the heathen in India" *(Biblical Commentary).* The offering of the Philistines was not, however, a *thank-offering,* it was rather a *talisman* or *charm.* "From the ancient writers of Arabia we learn how a talisman, or charm of this kind, was composed. They held that all earthly things are but shadows of heavenly things, and that the celestial forms have an overruling influence on all earthly forms of life. Thus, for instance, if they wished to give a man a talisman that would make him safe against the bite of serpents, they got the exact moment of his birth. Their books told them what planet "ruled his birth," what planet was then in full lustre. They waited for the moment when this planet was "out of combustion," *i.e.,* was not shining at its strength—the moment in which, thus shorn of its strength, it entered into the constellation which they called the Serpent. The favourable moment having arrived, they made a tiny stone or metal image of a serpent, engraved certain mystic letters upon it, and here was the talisman. So long as the man carried *that* about with him, no serpent could hurt him. Ancient literature is full of marvellous stories of the power of these talismans. . . . . It is this *talismanic* method that is alluded to in this passage, for, instead of reading "Ye shall make *images,*" etc., we ought to read, "Ye shall make *talismans* of your emrods, and *talismans* of your mice." *(S. Cox.)* "The Philistine astrologers could not but have heard that God had shown His Divine complacency with the brazen serpent, set upon a pole in the wilderness. This they, with their notions, would regard as a *telesme* (talisman), and as that image of a serpent

was effectual against the plague of serpents, they might not unreasonably infer that similar images of their own inflictions might be equally effectual; indeed, there have not been wanting persons to suggest that the whole of this set of ideas regarding telesmes may have originated in a distorted view of this transaction." *(Kitto.)*

Ver. 6. "**As the Egyptians.**" "Another testimony from the heathen to the truth of the Pentateuch, and a proof that God's judgments on Egypt were not without salutary effects on idolaters." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 7. "**Make a new cart,**" etc. "The new cart and the young cows, which had never worn a yoke, corresponded to the holiness of the ark of God. To place it upon an old cart, which had already been used for all kinds of earthly purposes, would have been an offence against the holy thing; and it would have been just the same to yoke to the cart animals that had already been used for drawing, and had had their strength impaired by the yoke. The reason for selecting cows, however, instead of male oxen, was no doubt to be found in the further object which they hoped to attain." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 9. "**Bethshemesh.**" "House of the sun," an Israelitish priestly city on the border of Judah and Dan (Josh. xxi. 16.) about twelve miles from Ekron.

Ver. 13. "Though it was a priestly city the inhabitants of Bethshemesh are expressly distinguished from the Levites." *(Erdmann.)* "**Wheat harvest.**" Therefore about May or June.

Ver. 14. "**Field of Joshua.**" "One who bore the same name as he who had brought Israel and the *ark* into Canaan." (*Wordsworth.*) "**A burnt offering.**" "It was lawful to offer the sacrifice here, because wherever the ark was offering might be made." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 18. "The Philistines offered as many golden mice as there were towns and villages in their five states; no doubt because the plague of mice had spread over the whole land, whereas the plague of boils had only fallen upon those towns to which the ark had come." (*Keil.*) "**Great stone of Abel.**" *Great stone* is not in the original. *Abel* means mourning, and some commentators think the stone was so named because of the lamentation mentioned in verse 19. Keil, Erdmann, and others, however, for *Abel* read *Eben* or *Aben*—a stone, as in verses 14 and 15.

Ver. 19. "**Fifty thousand,**" etc. In some Hebrew manuscripts the statement reads *seventy men, fifty thousand men.* Some do not contain the words *fifty thousand*, and Josephus speaks of only *three score and ten.* These considerations, added to the unlikelihood that Bethshemesh had so many inhabitants lead commentators to reject the words *fifty thousand* as an interpolation, or to read (as Patrick and others) *seventy* men; *fifty* out of a *thousand.*

Ver. 21. "**Kirjath-jearim,**" *i.e.*, city of woods or forests (Ps. cxxxii. 6), in the territory of Judah (Josh. ix. 17, xviii. 25, 26), generally identified with the present *Kuryet-el-Enab.* "It was the nearest large city to Bethshemesh, on the way to Shiloh, to which, perhaps, they supposed that the ark ought to return." (*Wordsworth.*) "The inhabitants belonging to the Hivite tetrapolis were the sacred servants of the sanctuary, and, therefore, the proper parties to whom, in the emergency, the custody of the ark should be committed. Bethshemesh, being in a low plain, and Kirjath-jearim on a hill, explains the message, 'Come ye down, and fetch it up to you.'" (*Jamieson.*)

NOTE.—"After the transaction recorded in this chapter, we hear no more of any attempts among the Gentile nations to join the Jewish worship with their own. They considered the God of Israel as a tutelary deity, absolutely unsociable, who would have nothing to do with any but his own people, or with such particularly as would worship him alone, and, therefore, in this respect, different from all other tutelary gods, each of which was willing to live in community with the rest." *(Warburton.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

THE RETURN OF THE ARK.

I. No change is needed in God to effect a change in His dealings with sinful men. The physician is as good when he is inflicting pain as when he is giving pleasure. It does not need a change of disposition in him to cause him to cease from giving pain to his patient; the change must be in the sick man himself. When a sinner feels that matters are not right between him and his God, he thinks that he should be in a better position if he could only change

God's disposition towards him; but no change is needed on the part of God. It is in the character and disposition of the sinner that the change must be made, if he is to have rest and hope in his relation to God. When the Philistines felt that the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them, they changed the place of the ark, thinking thereby to pacify God's displeasure, and change His disposition towards them. But what was needed was not change on the part of the Eternal God, but change in their relations towards Him.

II. Divine blessings may be turned into curses if men get into wrong relationship to them. Sunlight is intended by God to be a blessing to men. But the light of the sun brings pain to a man whose eyes are diseased. The suffering comes from his eyes and the sun not standing in that relation to each other which God intended they should do. Fire is a great blessing to man while it is kept in its right relation, while it is used as God intended it should be used, to minister to his bodily comfort. But if fire lays hold of his raiment, or his dwelling, a good gift of God becomes a curse, by getting into a wrong relation. And as it is with the material gifts of God, so it is with His spiritual gifts. All the Divine ordinances are intended as means of blessing and sanctification to the heart of men. Yet to some that which was ordained to bless becomes a curse—that which ought to be a savour of life becomes a savour of death. Men through ignorance or indifference do not put the Divine ordinances to a right use—get into a wrong relationship to them, and thus that which was designed to bless becomes a curse. The ark of God was designed by Him to be a means of grace and blessing to Israel by helping them to realise the presence and favour of the unseen God. It would also have become a blessing to the Philistines if they had considered the lessons which the fall of Dagon before it was designed to teach them. But the heathen disregarded the voice of God which spoke to them, and thus the presence of His ark became the means of judgment, because they stood in a wrong relation to it. And its return to Israel, which ought to have been an occasion of unmixed joy, was marked by a judgment upon the men of Bethshemesh, because of the thoughtless irreverence of their conduct—because they lacked a right conception of the holiness of the God whose presence the ark symbolised.

III. The human conscience testifies to the need of an atonement for sin. The heathen, ignorant as they are of the revelation of God, offer gifts and sacrifices to their deities. The Philistines here thought it expedient to try and make some expiation of their trespass against the God of Israel, and such a feeling of the need of atonement is found in almost every people in the world. And this feeling does not grow weaker in proportion as men possess the revelation of God. The conviction of the great distance between the holy God and sinful man increases as men grow in their knowledge of Him—the nearer view men have of His purity and greatness, the more are they disposed to exclaim with the men of Bethshemesh, "*Who is able to stand before this Holy Lord God?*" It is when the artist places his most finished work beside the real landscape that he realises how very far short he has come—the more closely they are compared the more clearly does he see the perfection of the one, and the imperfections of the other. And the more men know of God—the more they become acquainted with Him by the manifestations of His power and moral attributes, the more deeply convinced do they become of their own imperfections, and the more do they cry out for some atonement. When the Bethshemites, on the return of the ark, "offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the Lord," they were not only obeying the Levitical law, but they were acting in conformity to a law written in their hearts, and written with more or less distinctness in the hearts of all men. The offering of the Lord Jesus Christ

is not only said to be "offered to God," but also to the conscience of man (Heb. ix. 14, Rom. v. 11). The return of the ark also reminds us—

IV. That the enemies of God's Israel are not always to retain the portion of His children. A battle was fought in Eden, and the great enemy of God and man took from man his God-given inheritance. And from that day until now the "kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" have been held by Satan (Luke iv. 5, 6). This earth is still, to a great extent, in the hands of the enemies of its rightful possessor. But it is being won back. Each generation sees drawing nearer the day when there will be "*great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ*" (Rev. xi. 15). And this earth will be given back to men who have themselves been redeemed from the bondage of Satan. As Israel lost their ark so the world has been lost to man by his own sin; but it will not be always in the hands of his enemies—those who have returned to their allegiance to their rightful sovereign will one day inherit a redeemed earth.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. This was a long while for God's people to be without that visible pawn of His presence and glory; so that they might seem to be as forlorn and forsaken of Him. Such a misery may befall any people, to be bereft of God's ordinances; or any soul, to be for a time without the sense of His gracious presence and light of His countenance. But God hath promised to His, to be a "little sanctuary unto them" (Ezek. xi. 16), and "not to leave them," or if He do so, yet "not to forsake them," (Heb. xiii, 5), provided that they look on all other comforts as so many Ichabods, till He return unto them in mercy and loving-kindness.—*Trapp.*

It had wont to be a sure rule, wheresoever God is among men, there is the Church; here only it failed. The testimony of God's presence was many months among the Philistines, for a punishment of His own people whom He left; for a curse to those foreigners who entertained it. Israel was seven months without God. How do we think faithful Samuel took this absence? How desolate and forlorn did the tabernacle of God look without the ark! There were still the altars of God; His priests, Levites, tables, vails, censers, with all their legal accoutrements; these, without the ark, were as the sun without light, in the midst of an eclipse. If all these had been taken away, and only the ark remaining, the loss had been nothing to this, that the ark should be gone and they left; for what are all these without God, and how all-sufficient is God without these!—*Bp. Hall.*

Greater dishonour is done to God by those who call themselves His people, yet continue to slight and abuse the singular advantages with which they have been long favoured, than by the attacks of his avowed enemies. Hence He may often seem as it were to desert His own cause, and suffer the declared enemies of His name to triumph for a time, rather than take part with hypocritical pretenders, who with their lips profess that they know and serve Him, but in works deny Him. Thus He permitted the sacred symbol of His own presence to fall into the hands of Philistine idolators, rather than to remain dishonoured by idolatrous Israelites.—*Lindsay.*

Ver. 2. They say not, "What shall we do *with* it," for they were most of them resolved to send it home; but "What shall we do *to* it? How shall we send it home as it ought to be sent?" For they know that it is the manner that maketh or marreth an action. Sure it is that in divine matters men must look that not only the body of their service be sound, but that the clothes be fit.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 5. These sorcerers, like Balaam and Caiaphas, ignorantly spake the truth, and promoted God's glory and honour. *Peradventure.*—Idolators are always at uncertainty, and walking in darkness, know not whither they go.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 6. Samuel himself could not have spoken more divinely than these priests of Dagon. . . . . All religions have afforded them that speak well; these good words left them still Philistines and superstitious. How should men be hypocrites if they had not good tongues. . . . Who would think that wisdom and folly could lodge so near together that the same men should have care both for the glory of the true God, and the preservation of the false?—*Bp. Hall.*

The exact knowledge that the Philistine priests and soothsayers had of the punitive revelations of God against the Egyptians, and of the cause of them in the fact that the people hardened themselves against Him, is an eminent example of His government of the world, which was closely interwoven with the history of revelation in His kingdom, and in which he penetrated with the beams of His revealed light the darkness of heathenism which surrounded His people, and made preparation for the revelation of the New Covenant, which was to embrace the whole world. They were in such light to seek the Lord in their ways, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 12. *And the lords of the Philistines went after them.* And so, as servants and pages, they attend upon the ark, which erst as conquerors they carried captive.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 19. As it is hard not to overjoy in a sudden prosperity, and to use happiness is no less difficult than to forbear it, these glad Israelites cannot see, but they must gaze; they cannot gaze on the glorious outside, but they must be, whether out of rude jollity, or curiosity. or suspicion of the purloining of those sacred implements, prying into the secrets of God's ark. Nature is too subject to extremities, and is ever either too dull in want, or wanton in fruition; it is no easy matter to keep a mean, whether in good or evil . . . . . There was no malice in this curious inquisition: the same eyes that looked into the ark looked also up to heaven in their offerings; and the same hands that touched it offered sacrifice to the God that brought it. Who could expect anything now but acceptation? Who could suspect any danger? It is not a following act of devotion that can make amends for a former sin.—*Bishop Hall.*

God had just vindicated His own honour against the Philistines; it must now be seen that He would be sanctified in them that come nigh Him (Lev. x. 3). It is obvious to observe how the doctrine of atonement, and its necessity in the case of sinners, is taught in this and similar lessons as to the awful holiness of God.—*Biblical Commentary.*

Ver. 20, 21. Many appear joyful at the revival of religion, and numbers unite in external observances, who have no inward reverence for the Divine majesty . . . . Instead of this reverence, the carnal heart substitutes a slavish fear; and when rebuked for presumption or contempt, or alarmed with discoveries of the justice and holiness of God, it will, with the Gadarenes, or with these Bethshemites, request the Saviour to depart, and vainly seek to escape the Lord's displeasure, by an entire forgetfulness of Him.—*Scott.*

When God, so to speak, only passes by us, through some temporary taste of His presence, it is a favour which He may also impart to sinners. But that He may make His abode in us, as He promises in so many passages of Holy Scripture, that He may be willing to remain with us and in us, for that there is demanded great purity in every respect.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

The attribute of holiness is, to our own apprehension, so essential to the mere idea of God—is in itself so obvious and self-evident. that we may

at times be inclined to wonder at the frequency with which it is stated and enforced in the Scriptures. But the view of the Divine character out of which this feeling arises, is itself the creation of those scriptural declarations on the subject; and the formation of this high conception of God was the use they were designed to serve, and which we thus find that they have served. It may also be remembered, that to the Hebrews the enforcement of this doctrine was of an importance which it is scarcely in our power to understand or appreciate fully. The surrounding heathen—indeed all the heathen, had very different and inferior notions of the gods they served. Holiness was not their attribute. They were very capable of sin; and the choice of good in preference to evil was not essential to their nature. These were above men in their essence and in their sovereign powers; but in character they were men, and not always good men. There was no one attribute by which Jehovah was so pointedly distinguished from the gods of the nations as by this. Its maintenance, its constant assertion, was therefore of the utmost importance among a people whose tendencies so often were to merge the worship of their own Lord in that of the neighbouring idols. This attribute set a great gulf between them which could not be overpassed so long as its presence was constantly kept before the mind of the people. . . There was another and more general use in it, in which we share the benefit with them. It is a check to sin, and an incitement to righteousness. It seems impossible for anyone to realise a clear and distinct idea of the holiness of God—that sin, that whatever defiles, is abhorrent to His pure and holy nature, without hearing His voice crying unto us—"O, do not that abominable thing which I hate." . . . . Instead of imitating the ignorant Bethshemites, in putting away the ark of God from us, because we cannot stand before His holiness, let us rather strive after assimilation to Him, that we may be enabled to keep the ark among us.—*Kitto.*

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"The house of Abinadab," etc.** "Why the ark was not carried back to Shiloh is uncertain. The reason *may* be that the Philistines had conquered Shiloh, and now held it, as *Ewald* supposes; or it may be that, without a special revelation of the Divine will, they were unwilling to carry the ark back to the place whence it had been removed by a judgment of God, in consequence of the profanation of the Sanctuary by the sons of Eli *(Keil)*; or simply that the purpose was first and provisionally to carry it safely to a large city as far off as possible, inasmuch as, in view of the sentence which had been passed on Shiloh, they did not dare to select on their own authority a new place for the Sanctuary" *(Erdmann)*. "It is probable that Abinadab and his sons were of the house of Levi. 1. For the catastrophe at Bethshemesh must inevitably have made the Israelites very careful to pay due honour to the ark in accordance with the law. 2. The fact of there being a high place at Kirjath-jearim makes it highly probable that there were priests there. 3. The names Eleazar, Uzzah, and Ahio are all names in Levitical families, and Abinadab is nearly allied to Nadab and Amminadab, both Levitical names. 4. It is inconceivable that the breaches of the law in looking into the ark, and in Uzzah laying hold of it, should have been so severely punished, but the neglect to employ the sons of Levi according to the law should not be even adverted to." *(Biblical Commentary.)* **"To keep the ark."** "*Not* to *minister* before it; but only to defend it from such profane intrusions as had caused so much suffering to the Bethshemites." *(Wordsworth.)*

Ver. 2. **"Twenty years,"** *i.e.*, twenty years before the events occurred which are recorded in this chapter. It was a much longer time before David brought the ark again to the tabernacle (2 Sam. vi. 1-17), although it is not certain whether it remained in Kirjath-jearim until that time. During these twenty years it is obvious (from ver. 3) that the Philistine domination

continued. "**All the house of Israel lamented,**" etc. "The image is that of a child that goes weeping after its father or mother, that it may be relieved of what hurts it. . . . , As, beside the constant pressure of the Philistine rule, no special calamity is mentioned, we must suppose a gradual preparation for this penitential temper of the people, which now, after the lapse of twenty years from the return of the ark, was become universal. The preparation came from within. By what means? By the prophetic labours of Samuel, from the summary description of which, according to their intensive power, their extensive manifestation, and their results in the whole nation (iii. 19-21), we may clearly see that Samuel, without ceasing, proclaimed to the people the Word of God. And as in chap. iii. 19 it is said that "none of his words fell to the ground," we shall have occasion to recognise this penitential temper, and this following after God with sighing and lamentation, as the fruit of Samuel's prophetic labours, which were directed to the relation of the innermost life of the people to their God." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 3. "**If ye do return,**" etc. "These words prove that a profession of repentance on the part of Israel had preceded them. . . The profession, therefore, must be looked for in the preceding words, All the house of Israel lamented," etc.—(*Biblical Commentary*).

Ver. 4. "**Baalim and Ashtaroth.**" The plurals of Baal and Ashtoreth. "Baal was the supreme male divinity of the Phœnician and Canaanitish nations, as Ashtoreth was their supreme female divinity. Both names have the peculiarity of being used in the plural, and it seems certain that these plurals designate not statues of the divinities, but different modifications of the divinities themselves. . . There can be no doubt of the very high antiquity of the worship of Baal. . . We need not hesitate to regard the Babylonian Bel (Isa. xlvi. 1), or Belus (Herod i. 181), as essentially identical with Baal, though perhaps under some modified form. . . . The great number of adjuncts with which the name is found is a sufficient proof of the diversity of characters in which he was regarded, and there must no doubt have existed a corresponding diversity in the worship. . . . If we separate the name Baal from idolatry, we seem, according to its meaning, to obtain simply the notion of Lord and Proprietor of all. . . . The worship of Ashtaroth or Astarte was also very ancient and widely spread. There is no doubt that the Assyrian goddess Ishtar is the Ashtaroth of the Old Testament and the Astarte of the Greeks and Romans. . . It is certain that the worship of Astarte became identical with that of Venus. . . . If now we seek to ascertain the character of this goddess, we find ourselves involved in perplexity. There can be no doubt that the general notion symbolised is that of productive power, as Baal symbolises that of generative power, and it would be natural to conclude that as the sun is the great symbol of the latter, and therefore to be identified with Baal, so the moon is the symbol of the former, and must be identified with Astarte" (*Smith's Biblical Dictionary*).

"**Mizpeh,** or Mizpah. The word signifies a *watch-tower*, and was given to more than one place in the land of Israel. The place here mentioned has been generally identified with the present *Neby-Samwil*, an elevation near Ramah and Geba (see 1 Kings xv. 22; 2 Chron. xvi. 6), and 2480 feet above the level of the sea, and five miles from Jerusalem. Dean Stanley and Mr. Grove (*Smith's Bib. Dictionary*) consider that Neby-Samwil is too far from Jerusalem to answer to the description given of its position in 1 Mac. iii. 46, and identity it with the *Scopus* mentioned by Josephus (B. I. 2, 19, 4), as on the north quarter of the city, seven stadia therefrom, and now generally held to be the "broad ridge which forms the continuation of the Mount of Olives to the north and east, from which the traveller gains his first view of the holy city" (*Grove*). "**I will pray for you.**" That deliverance from the hand of the Philistines was not at least immediately the object of the intercession is clear, not only from the phrase "for you," since otherwise Samuel must have used an expression to include himself, but also from the following words."—(*Erdmann*).

Ver. 6. "**Drew water, and poured it out before the Lord,**" etc. "It is remarkable that two rites are brought together here which belong respectively to the Feast of Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement. The first is not, indeed, prescribed by the law, but it was the custom for the High Priest to fill a golden vessel with water drawn from the fountain of-Siloam, and to pour it over the sacrifices on the Feast of Tabernacles. Allusions to this, which was a joyful act, are supposed to be made in Isa. xii. 3, and John vii. 37, 38. . . . The only fast enjoined by the law of Moses was on the Day of Atonement, upon the 10th Tisri. . . . It is likely, as in Ezra iii. 4, 6, and in Neh. vii. 73; viii. 1-17, that Samuel also chose the Feast of Tabernacles, and the fast which preceded it, as the occasion for assembling the people. The drawing water being mentioned before the fasting is, it is true, rather against this view, though not conclusively, as the mention of the fasting may be supplemental; the real order being that they first fasted and confessed their sins on the Day of Atonement, and then joyfully kept the Feast of Tabernacles. If the fast here mentioned is not that of the 10th Tisri, it may be compared with that of Ezra x. 6, and those alluded to in Zech. vii. 5, and perhaps the pouring out of water (which is variously explained), may be taken in connection with the fasting (as Ezra did eat no bread, and drink no water). . . . Other explanations of the act are (with the Targum), "they poured out their hearts in penitence as it were water," or that it was a symbolical act of expressing their ruin

and helplessness, according to the saying in 2 Sam. xiv. 14, or that the water typified their desire that their sins might be forgotten "as waters that pass away" (Job xi. 16).—(*Biblical Commentary.*)

"**And Samuel judged Israel.**" "With respect to the position of the judges, it is generally estimated falsely when they are looked upon as proper judicial personages in our sense. . . . . This error has been occasioned by the assumption that the Hebrew word is perfectly synonymous with our *judging*, while in reality it has a much wider signification. In the Book of Judges it generally denotes the exercise of authority and superiority. . . . Only of Deborah do we read, in Judges iv. 5, that the Israelites went up to her for judgment. But she cannot be placed upon a level with the judges throughout. She pronounced judgment as a prophetess in matters where no confidence was placed in the ordinary judicial jurisdiction, and a judgment of God in the proper sense was desired, just as, according to Exod. xviii., the nation leaving their natural judges, thronged to Moses, to draw justice immediately from its source. Samuel's position was exactly similar to that of Deborah, he was judge in another sense than the judges of the Book of Judges.—(*Hengstenberg.*)

(See also on Ver. 15).

Ver. 7. "When the Philistines heard," etc. "Apprehending that such a gathering under one so well known as Samuel boded no good to their dominions, and might be intended to organise the assertion of the nation's own independence."—*(Kitto.)*

Ver. 9. "Samuel, though only a Levite, offered a burnt offering to the Lord at Mizpeh, because the regular ministries of the tabernacle which was separated from the ark were in abeyance, and God had not yet chosen any fixed place to set His name there, after the destruction of Shiloh; and Samuel was raised up with a special commission from God to supply the deficiency of the transitory and provisional state of things."—(*Wordsworth.*) (See also comments of this verse.)

Ver. 12. "**Shen,**" literally a *tooth*, doubtless a rocky eminence in the neighbourhood. It has not been identified. "**Ebenezer,**" or *Eben-ha-ezer*, i.e., *stone of help.*

Ver. 13. "**They came no more.**" "They no more invaded the territory of Israel with lasting success as they had done before." The words which immediately follow—"**the hand of Jehovah was against the Philistines,**" etc., show that they made attempts to recover their lost supremacy, but that so long as Samuel lived they were unable to effect anything against Israel" (*Keil*). The forty years domination, mentioned in Judges xiii. 1, now terminated.

Ver. 14. "**From Ekron even unto Gath.**" "This definition is probably to be understood as *exclusive*, i.e., as signifying that the Israelites received back their cities up to the very borders of the Philistines, measuring these borders from Ekron to Gath. For although these chief cities of the Philistines had been allotted to the tribes of Judah and Dan, in the time of Joshua (Josh. xiii. 3, 4; xv. 45, 46), yet, notwithstanding the fact that Judah and Simeon conquered Ekron, together with Gaza and Askelon, after the death of Joshua (Judges i. 18), the Israelites did not obtain any permanent possession."—(*Keil*).

"**And there was peace,**" etc. "These words suggest what is in itself very probable, that in this war the Amorites, finding the Philistines worse masters than the Israelites, made common cause with Samuel, and assisted the Israelites in their wars against the Philistines."—(*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 15. "**And Samuel judged Israel.**" "We must regard Samuel's judging as a directing and ordering, in accordance with the above act of repentance, of the inner affairs of the people, who were by that religious act inwardly again purified. It consisted both in the administration of right and justice according to the law of the Lord, and in government proper, in the wise carrying out of measures that looked to the good of the people. During Saul's life he kept unchanged the position of a prophet, who employed the authority of the Divine will for the direction of the national life—the mediating priestly position between God and the people; but he also, as last judge, held in his hands the highest control of the theocracy and the kingdom." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 16. "**Bethel.**" "A well-known city and holy place of central Palestine, twelve miles from Jerusalem, on the road to Sichem, where its ruins still lie under the scarcely altered name of Beitin." *(Smith's Bib. Dictionary.)* "**Gilgal.**" At least two places in ancient Palestine were so named, one in the Jordan valley, between that river and Jericho (Josh. iv. 19), and one south-west of Shiloh, now called Jiljilia (1 Kings ii. 1). It is impossible to decide which is the place here mentioned. Dr. Erdmann says, "The question must be decided in favour of the former, for the reason that Samuel would certainly choose for such assemblies the place that was consecrated by its historical association and religious importance." Keil rather leans to the opinion that it was the modern Jiljilia.

Ver. 17. "**Ramah.**" See note on chap. i. 1. "**There he builded an altar.**" Another instance of Samuel's deviation from the Levitical law. See note on verse 9.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1 *and* 2.

Care for the Ark of God.

I. The judgments of God for contempt of His ordinances often make men more careful in the treatment of them. If the subject of a well-ordered state sets at nought its ordinances he finds himself visited with a penalty which generally leads him to be more careful of his future conduct. He must render honour where honour is due, whether it be to a person or to a law, or he will be visited with punishment which, if he do not profit by himself, will prove a salutary lesson to others. When a child has played with the fire until he has been burnt, he is not only more careful for the rest of his life how he trifles with it, but others learn a lesson from his sufferings and his scars. And when God punishes men for lightly esteeming that which He has commanded them to reverence, it is that those who suffer, and those who see them suffer, may fear to fall into the same sin. A fear which brings reverence is a motive power in the dispensation of the Gospel, as well as in that which preceded it. In the New Testament cases of judgment are recorded which were as swift and terrible as any found in Old Testament history. Men have needed, even in Gospel times, to be taught reverence for holy beings and holy ordinances by punishment which has worked fear. Ananias and Sapphira thought it a light matter to "lie to the Holy Ghost," and their sudden death wrought "great fear upon all the Church" (Acts v. 11) which led to an increased reverence for the spirit of God. Elymas poured contempt upon the message of salvation as preached by Paul, and was struck with blindness by the man whose heart's desire and prayer to God for all his countrymen was that they should be saved. But the judgment which fell upon the Jew led to the salvation of the Gentile, and taught all who beheld it that God will not hold them guiltless who scoff at the name of His Son (Acts xiii. 6–12). In the case of the "seven sons of Sceva" (Acts xix. 13-17) men learnt that they must not lightly use the name of the Lord Jesus, and the effect of the punishment of those who did so was that when it "*was known to all the Jews and Greeks dwelling at Ephesus that fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.* Men of every age have needed to be taught not only that "God is love," but that He is "a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29), that it is indeed His love which leads Him to visit men with judgment for contempt of His holy name and ordinances, in order that others may see it and fear, as the visitation upon the men of Bethshemesh led those of Kirjath-jearim to be more reverent in their treatment of the ark of God. In all the after history of Israel we never hear of their being guilty of a similar act. The death of the Bethshemites was an effectual preventive of any more attempts of this kind.

II. Those who minister in holy things are especially bound to live holy lives. The men of Kirjath-jearim set apart a man for the special service of the ark. "They sanctifieth Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord." For every service in the world some qualification is needed, and men are not made custodians of men's lives, or even of their property, unless they are believed to possess the qualifications indispensable to the fulfilment of the duties of the office. The setting apart of men in the Old Testament dispensation to the service of the tabernacle sets forth the truth that those who minister in holy things under the Gospel dispensation are especially bound to "come out from the world and be separate," in a spiritual sense, that whatever else they lack, a high moral character is indispensable. It also suggests the need that such men should remember the apostolic exhortation, and give themselves "wholly" to the special work, and not "entangle themselves with the affairs of this life" (1 Tim. iv. 15; 2 Tim. ii. 4).

III. Men learn the value of Divine ordinances when they are deprived of them. When men have abundance of bread and water they have very little sense of the value of these necessaries of life. But if they are wholly or even partially deprived of them they realise how precious they really are. Want makes us sensible of the blessing of abundance. Sickness teaches us to appreciate the blessing of health, and days of gloom make us sensible how good a gift of God is sunshine. And we never know the true value of religious ordinances until we are deprived of them. Those whom sickness has long kept from the house of God, or those who have sojourned in a land where there were no stated Divine ordinances, testify to the truth of this. When the soul of a godly man is shut away from God's house, and has no opportunity of meeting Him in His sanctuary, then the sigh goes up to Heaven "*How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the Living God. . . . Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee. . . . For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness*" (Psalm lxxxiv. 1-10). This was David's experience, and thousands since he penned these words have used them to express their own feelings. Israel had for many years before this time had special religious privileges—compared with the rest of the nations they had had a plentiful supply of spiritual bread. But they had treated it as they had treated the manna in the wilderness—familiarity had bred contempt, and they had despised the means of grace, because they had been always in their midst. But the absence of the ark from Shiloh had suspended all the usual tabernacle-service, and the long famine of Divine ordinances caused them to "lament after the Lord."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. Shiloh was wont to be the place which was honoured with the presence of the ark. Ever since the wickedness of Eli's sons, that was forlorn and desolate, and now Kirjath-jearim succeeds to this privilege. It did not stand with the royal liberty of God, no, not under the law, to tie himself unto places and persons. Unworthiness was ever a sufficient cause of exchange. It was not yet His time to stir from the Jews, yet He removed from one province to another. Less reason have we to think that so God will reside among us, that none of our provocations can drive Him from us.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. **2.** *The time was long* ere Samuel could bring them to this solemn conversion related in the verses following: so tough is the old Adam, and so difficult a thing it is to work upon such as are habituated and hardened in sinful practices. Samuel's song had been, as was afterwards Jeremiah's (Chap. xiii. 27), "Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be? They refused to return until God stopped them with the cross, suffered the Philistines grievously to oppress them, and then "*all the house of Israel lamented after the law.*"—*Trapp.*

There is no mention of their lamenting after the Lord while He was gone, but when He was returned and settled in Kirjath-jearim. The mercies of God draw more tears from His children than his judgments do from His enemies. There is no better sign of good nature or grace than to be won to repentance with kindness; not to think of God except we be beaten into it, is servile. Because God was come again to Israel, therefore Israel is returned to God; if God had not come first they had never come; if He, that came to them, had not made them come to Him, they had been ever parted; they were cloyed with God,

while He was perpetually resident with them; now that His absence had made Him dainty, they cleave to Him fervently and penitently in His return. This was it that God meant in His departure, a better welcome at His coming back.—*Bp. Hall.*

I. The persons lamenting. God's peculiar people. These only love, and mind God's presence; when the lords and cities of the Philistines are weary of Him, and send Him away, yea, and the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, though a city of Levites belonging to the Church of God, through their ill management of matters send to get a release, yet God's Israel will look after their God. **II. The object they lament after**—not peace, plenty, or victory over their enemies, but after the Lord. Jehovah is the object of their affections; it is He whom they love, and with whom they long for communion. **III. The universality of the number.**—all Israel. The whole house of Israel come; they that had woefully degenerated and had gone after their idols; what a wonderful act of God's power and sovereignty was this upon their spirits. By this He manifests that He is the true God, and that Samuel was His servant. . . Christians should lament after the God of ordinances, or God in ordinances.—I. *Because God is infinitely more worth than all ordinances; His presence is prizable for itself.* This is the marrow of heaven, the want of this is hell, and this the child of God knows. II. *God purposely withdraws that men may lament after Him.* As when a mother steps out of a child's sight, and when she seems to be gone, the child raises a cry after her (Hos. v. 15). "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early." III. *Because sincere lamenting after the Lord may occasion His return.* He purposely hovers, waits, and expects, that His people may call Him back by their prayers, entreaties, humiliation; not as though God were moved, or changed by men's mournful complaints and outcries, but that such an earnest lamenting qualifies the subject, capacitates for mercy, and puts souls into the condition of the promise (Jer. xxix. 12). —*Oliver Heywood.*

The blessing of national mourning in a time of universal distress. (1) Penitent recognition of the *national sin* which has *occasioned* it. (2) Painful experience of the mighty hand which has *inflicted* it. (3) Sorrowful, penitent *seeking* after the Lord's consolation and help, which ends in *finding.*—*Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3 and 4.

Repentance.

I. Repentance is the lessening of a moral distance between God and man by a moral turning of man to God. "If ye do return unto the Lord," etc. When a man turns and walks in an opposite direction he changes his course, and lessens the distance between himself and the point to which his back has been hitherto turned, and from which he has been every moment getting farther away. His face is now directed to an entirely opposite goal, and the distance between him and that goal grows less at every step. Repentance is not a bodily act—it is a turning of the *heart.* "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your *hearts.*" Directly the heart turns to God in penitence and trust the moral distance between that heart and God is lessened. That turning is the beginning of a new course of life, which daily decreases the distance between the man and his former way of life, and brings him nearer to God in his sympathies, and in his character. And this goes on until there is entire conformity of the character of God,—until the just man becomes the perfect man, and all the moral distance which once separated him from God is annihilated. Locally, God is as near to

the sinner as He is to the saint. He was locally as near to the Israelites in general as He was to Samuel in particular. "God is not far from *every one of us*," said Paul to the Athenians (Acts xvii. 27). Yet God was morally much nearer to Paul than He was to any other man on Mars Hill, because Paul was much more like God in character than they were. And there was also a great gulf of moral difference between Samuel and his hearers, because there was a wide gulf between them and Jehovah in character and disposition. Paul had once been far from the God whom He now served, and the Saviour for whom he was now ready to die, but he had diminished that distance by repentance—by an entire change in his feelings concerning Jesus of Nazareth, and by a corresponding change of life. The people whom Samuel here exhorts were at such a moral distance from God that they had become partakers of the debasing idolatry of the Canaanites, and the worship of Baal had increased the natural badness of the national character. As the road of iniquity is downhill, every step in the road had not only brought them farther from God, but had increased the speed at which they had departed farther and farther from Him. Samuel here teaches that a turning of heart to God would be the beginning of a moral transformation—it would at once begin to lessen the moral distance between them and Jehovah, and begin to make a separation between them and the sinful habits in which they had been living. He tells them in effect, what another prophet afterwards told their descendants, that "*The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you*" (Isa. lix. 1, 2).

II. Repentance is born of a sense of need. A local change of place is often brought about by a sense of need. The man feels dissatisfied with what he meets with in the road in which he is travelling, and his dissatisfaction leads him to turn round and take another course. And so it is in a change of *soul-direction*. The prodigal's sense of need led him to set his face towards his father's house, and Israel had now begun to feel that they wanted something as a nation which Baal and Ashtaroth could not give them. They "lamented after the Lord." Such a feeling of want is a sign of a re-awakening conscience—it is like the outcry of the man who was thought to be dead before the surgeon's knife touched him—it is a sign of returning consciousness. The very fact that he can feel leads to the hope that he may recover. He who feels a sense of spiritual need is not morally dead—his conscience may have been lying dormant for a long time, but its outcry is a sure sign that it is not dead, and is often the first step to a true repentance.

III. Human exhortation is often helpful to repentance. If a man is awakening to a sense of the moral separation which sin has made between him and God, the words of a godly man will often deepen the feeling and determine him to turn to God. The words of Peter on the day of Pentecost helped his hearers to repentance. His words first pricked their hearts and then helped them to accept Him whom they had crucified. Samuel's words of exhortation meeting the feeling of need in the hearts of Israel, encouraged and stimulated their desire to return to God.

IV. Repentance is the result of a preparation of heart, and shows its reality in the life. Samuel here speaks of two things as necessary to a turning unto God. "Prepare your hearts," and "put away Balaam and Ashtaroth." No thoughtful man makes any great change in his life without first making it the subject of consideration, without counting the cost of what he is about to do. He who thinks about leaving his native land, never to return, does not set out upon his journey without well weighing the consequences of such a step.

Changes in our modes and habits of life, if made without thought, are not likely to be either satisfactory or beneficial. And when a man begins to think of returning to God by repentance it is especially necessary that he should ponder deeply what repentance is—what is involved in forsaking sin and becoming a servant of God—in turning his back upon his old life, and beginning an entirely opposite course. It was when the prodigal "came to himself" that he said, "I will arise and go to my father." That expression implies that there had been much thinking on his part about his past, his present, and his future. Such thinking deepens and strengthens moral resolution, and leads to prayer, and no change of feeling is likely to end in that lasting change of heart and life in which true repentance consists, unless it has its birth in such a preparation. Samuel here insists on such a thoughtfulness and prayerfulness on the part of Israel as indispensable to a true and lasting return to God. And repentance of heart must be proved by a change of life. Israel could not return to God and continue to worship the gods of the Philistines. "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. vi. 24), and he who professes to desire the favour of God must show the reality of his profession by putting off the service of Satan and the "works of darkness" (Rom. xiii. 12), by putting away everything in his life that is contrary to the mind and will of God.

V. After repentance comes liberty. "If ye do return," etc., ... "the Lord will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." Every unrepentant man is a slave to sin. "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John viii. 34)—he is tied and bound by evil habits and passions. But the formation of new and holy desires and habits frees him from the dominion of the old ones, as the formation of the new leaf-buds on the tree pushes off the old and withering leaves. In proportion as the former increase in size and strength, the latter lose their hold; and in proportion as new habits, springing from a new soul-relation, gain strength, the old habits lose their power, and give the man true liberty. The political freedom which Israel gained by turning from Baal to God is a type of the moral freedom which comes to every man who truly repents.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Samuel doth not presently cheer them up, but presseth them to a thorough reformation: and giveth them to know that their sorrow must bear some proportion to their sin. See the like done by Peter in Acts ii. 37, 38.—*Trapp.*

Revivals of religion have been the blessed experience of the Church in every era of its living history. Whether we trace its course in the Old or New Testament, or in subsequent times, evidences of occasional awakenings, with all their happy results, abound. . . . . At Bochim, in the early days of the Judges, a great revival took place. In the days of Samuel the Church of God was gladdened by another. Hezekiah's reign was greatly signalised by the general revival of religion; so was Josiah's. The nation of Judah was preserved from idolatry by means of these great awakenings. In the time of the building of the second Temple there was a revival of religion, which wrought most influentially. Pentecost stands prominent in the history of revivals, and throughout the last eighteen centuries revivals have been occasional, and form the most interesting portions of the Church's history. . . . . Two features have generally marked these periods of spiritual awakening,—the *power of prayer*, and the *power of preaching*. . . . . The revival under Samuel was brought about by prayer and preaching. To this man it is instrumentally to be traced. He wrestled in secret and exhorted in public. . . .

I. Samuel preached repentance. This has ever been the theme in times of attempted revival. It was the theme of Noah's alarm-cry to the gigantic sinners of the old world. It was the burden of Elijah's prophetic message. It was the voice in the wilderness from the lips of John the Baptist. It was the summons which the apostles served in the name of Christ upon a godless world. It rang through Germany by Luther's lips of music, and echoed among the Alpine valleys from Luther's patriotic soul. It was the subject of Latimer's blunt home-thrusts at the practical heart of England, and it thundered throughout Scotland from the stern and fearless Knox. The doctrine of repentance is the appendix to every re-publication of the ten commandments, and the preface to every offer of the Gospel. So when Samuel taught, this was his awakening theme. . . . **II. Samuel sought fruits for repentance.** He did not rest satisfied with the expressed emotion. He demanded instant reproof of expressed sincerity. To give up evil ways is one of the earliest signs of a penitent soul. . . . . This is the trial of conviction. You may profess anxiety to be saved, and mourn over your sins; but so long as you do not give up what comes between your soul and God, you have not sincerely repented. . . . **III. Samuel urged a believing return to the Lord.** . . . . Repentance does not constitute reformation. It is only the outer court. By faith we enter into the holy place. . . . . Faith is the reunion of the soul to the Lord. So when the Israelites gave up the false, they returned to the true God. They forsook the many and returned to the One. . . . . The heart must have an object. No person is without a god, to whom all his efforts are devoted, and on whom his affections are placed. It may be the world, or the creature, or self, or some superstition, or else the true God. . . . But the awakened conscience finds no satisfaction in anything less than the Lord.—*Steel.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5, 6, 15—17.

THE GATHERING AT MIZPEH.

I. If a nation is to have strength and liberty it must have unity. "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh." If a human body is to be strong, and consequently free to act, there must be a united action of all its members. Every limb and organ must work harmoniously together. So with the human soul. All its powers must gather themselves together—there must be a concentration of all its forces—if there is to be any result of worth. Hence the Psalmist's prayer—"*Unite my heart to fear Thy name*" (Psalm lxxxvi. 11), and the Apostle's declaration, "*This one thing I do*" (Phil. iii. 13). And the same thing is true of any corporate body, whether it be large or small. It will not have power unless its action is united, and if a nation is not strong by unity it will not long be free. Samuel here aims at the united action of the whole nation. This unity—1. *Is often brought about by a common calamity.* Common afflictions and dangers have a wonderful power to bring men together. If the reputation of a family is attacked from without, all its members will forget little differences, and unite to attack a common foe. The Church of God needs nothing but a return of the days of persecution to bring all its members into such a unity of spirit as would astonish all her foes. It would then be seen how strong is the unseen bond which unites them all to a common head. When a nation arrives at a great crisis in its history—especially when it is threatened by a common foe—all minor differences of opinion are forgotten for the time—all party distinctions are laid aside and the nation acts as one man. It was the Philistine oppression which brought the Israelites at this time to such unanimous action. They felt

that this was not the time for "Ephraim to envy Judah, nor Judah to vex Ephraim" (Isa. xi. 13). 2. *Such unity can only be real and lasting by being founded on right relations to God.* The fear of God is the only solid ground of national unity. When each man is governed by a desire to serve God, a oneness of aim and purpose in the nation must be the result, and in proportion as such feelings sway a people, in such proportion will there be concord in their assemblies, and unanimity in their actions. The unity of Israel at this time was based upon a common conviction of transgression against God, and a desire to return to Him; and in proportion as these feelings were deep and heartfelt, there was ground upon which to build a real and permanent union of the people. 3. *It is good for such a national unity to find expression in a national assembly.* Such a gathering increases the feeling of unity, and encourages the spirit of the nation by giving it an opportunity of feeling its strength. It likewise intimidates its foes. The national gathering at Mizpeh was helpful to the Israelites themselves, and was a just ground of apprehension to their oppressors.

II. It is a great blessing to a nation to have a head who is both intellectually and morally great. Men must have leaders, and it matters little by what name a national leader is called—whether king, president, or prime minister, provided he exercises his power with intellectual ability and for moral ends. Such a man should, like Samuel, combine in himself something of the prophet, the judge, and the priest. He teaches by his life, and by his words, he is a judge inasmuch as he is a stern reprover of all wrong, and fails not to enforce penalty for transgression of national law, and he is also a priest, for such a man will not fail to bear on his heart before God in prayer those who look up to him for guidance. Such a man is a true king of his nation, whether he wears a crown or not. Samuel was such an uncrowned king—a true father of Israel, a true shepherd of his people. As a prophet, he made known to them the will of Jehovah; as judge, he kept pure the fountains of justice; and as at Mizpeh he "cried unto the Lord for Israel" (ver. 9), we may be sure that upon the altar at Ramah he offered sacrifices, not only for his own sins, but also for those of the people.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 5. Intercession to the Lord for the salvation of others. 1. *Its exercise unlimited,* the individual as well as the whole people being its subject (comp. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2). 2. *Its answer conditioned* by the need of salvation, and the capacity for salvation of those for whom it is made.

Ver. 6. The penitent confession—"We have sinned against the Lord." 1. *Who has to make it,* the individual, family, congregation, church, the whole people. 2. *How is it to be made,* with attestation of its truth and uprightness by deeds of repentance. 3. *What are its consequences,* forgiveness of sin, deliverance from the power of the wicked one, salvation.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 16, 17. Simply the vice-regent of God, and no king, Samuel had no palace in Israel. No armed guards protected the person, nor gorgeous retinue attended the steps of Samuel. No pomp of royalty disturbed the simple manner of his life, or distinguished him from other men; yet there rose by his house in Ramah that which proclaimed to all the land the personal character of its ruler, and the principles upon which he was to conduct his government. In a way not to be mistaken, Samuel associated the throne with the altar, earthly power

with piety, the good of the country with the glory of God. That altar had a voice no man could mistake. In a manner more expressive than proclamation made by royal heralds with painted tabards and sounding trumpets, it proclaimed to the tribes of Israel that piety was to be the character, and the will of God the rule, of his government.—*Guthrie.*

***MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.*—*Verses* 7—12.**

THE DEFEAT OF THE PHILISTINES.

I. Opposition to the covenant-people of God furnishes occasion for the fulfilment of the Divine promises. God had promised Abraham that He would bring out His descendants from the land of their captivity with "great substance," and "judge the nation whom they should serve" (Gen. xv. 14), and the opposition of Pharaoh furnished an occasion for the fulfilment of that promise. The Lord had answered Samuel's prayer for Israel's freedom, and even "while he was offering the burnt offering" the Philistines furnished an occasion for the fulfilment of the promise by "drawing near to battle against Israel." In the history of a man's individual life the opposition from Satanic and human enemies often furnishes occasion to show that "*He is faithful that promised*" (Heb. v. 23).

II. The covenant-promises of God are fulfilled also in answer to prayer. When the time drew near for the redemption of Israel from Egypt, "their cry went up to God by reason of the bondage" (Exod. ii. 23), and the prayer and faith of Moses came in to help forward the fulfilment of the promise of deliverance. When the seventy years' captivity was nearly accomplished, the supplication of Daniel was one instrument of bringing the fulfilment of God's purpose of mercy (Dan. ix.). When Our Lord was about to leave the world He promised to His disciples the gift of the Holy Ghost, but they understood well that they must "continue in prayer and supplication" for that Divine gift (Acts i. 4, 14). And the promises given to the individual Christian are all fulfilled in answer to prayer. He is to "*be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication to let his requests be made known unto God*" (Phil. iv. 6). The promise had been made to Israel that if they put away their strange gods and returned unto the Lord, He would deliver them out of the hand of the Philistines; but they were right in interpreting this promise as to be fulfilled in answer to prayer, and, therefore, in beseeching Samuel to cease not to cry unto the Lord for them.

III. Character has a mighty influence in bringing answers to prayer. Why did Israel say to Samuel, "Cry unto the Lord our God for us?" It was because they felt that "*the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (James v. 16). Much of the availing power of prayer is in the *character* that is linked to it. The cry of Moses for his people was often more effectual than the cry of the thousands of Israel. So mighty was his power with the Eternal that, in answer to his intercession, "*the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people*" (Ex. xxxii. 14). If this be so in relation to sinful men, how mighty must be the efficacy of the intercession of the sinless Son of God on behalf of His disciples! If the prayers of men of like passions with ourselves have an influence with God, how mighty must be the prayers of the sinless and Divine man!

IV. Answers to prayer in the present should bring thanksgiving for like blessings in the past. An act of kindness from a friend who has befriended us many times before, brings back to our remembrance all his kind deeds in the past, all the benefits that he has conferred in days that are gone pass again

before us every time we are recipients of his bounty. This is, or ought to be, especially the case with gifts received from the hand of God, and especially with good things given in answer to prayer. Thankfulness for the mercy of to-day ought to be deepened by recalling the mercies of past days. When Samuel looked back at the past history of his people, he recalled many instances of God's loving kindness to a people who had, notwithstanding, often rebelled against Him. And the thought of the many Divine interpositions in the past deepened his gratitude for the present deliverance. His "*hitherto*," speaks his thanksgiving for all the help of God to Israel from the day in which they left Egypt until the day which had just passed, and when any man bows before God in gratitude for a present answer to prayer, he should connect it by a *hitherto* with all that have gone before.

V. It is good for our gratitude to God to show itself in an external form. We like to express our gratitude to a human friend in some practical form as we thereby give a body, as it were, to that which is itself unseen. And it is good to testify our thankfulness to God by some external manifestation, as we thereby perpetuate a remembrance of His goodness and make it known to others. Samuel desired that God's deliverance at this time should live in the memory of the present generation, and be handed down to their descendants, therefore he embodies his feeling in a pillar of remembrance—"he took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it '*Ebenezer*.'"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 7. The Philistines come up, and the Israelites fear, they that had not the wit to fear, whilst they were not friends to God, have not now the grace of fearlessness, when they were reconciled to God. Boldness and fear are commonly misplaced in the best hearts; when we should tremble, we are confident; and when we should be assured, we tremble. Why should Israel have feared, since they had made their peace with the Lord of Hosts? Nothing should affright those which are upright with God: the peace which Israel had made with God was true, but tender.—*Bishop Hall.*

1. *How evil sometimes seems to come out of good.* The religious meeting of the Israelites brought trouble upon them from the Philistines. 2. *How good is at length brought out of that evil.* Israel could never be threatened more seasonably than at this time, when they were repenting and praying. . . . . Bad policy for the Philistines to *make war* upon Israel when they were *making their peace* with God.—*Henry.*

Ver. 8. An evidence of Samuel's habitual resort to God in prayer for help. (See chap. xii. 19–23.) In Psa. xcix. 6, Samuel is specially mentioned as given to prayer, and as prevailing by prayer. "*Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His name: these called upon the Lord, and He heard them;*" and in Jer. xv. 1, God says, "*Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be towards this people.*" Samuel had been given by God in answer to His mother's prayers, and his whole life seems to have been governed by a sense of the power of prayer, to which his birth was due . . . . The forty year's domination of the Philistines over Israel could not be overthrown by the supernatural strength of Samson, but it was terminated by the prayers of Samuel: so much more powerful are the weapons of prayer in the hands of righteous men than any arm of flesh.—*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 9. It is difficult to reconcile the severe judgments denounced and inflicted for irregularities in the ritual service, with the direct sanction and

approval which attended the irregular actions of Samuel and other prophets with regard to the ritual observances. The point is of importance, for it is the action of the prophets from this time forward upon public affairs which gives to the history of the Jews their *peculiar* character. . . . . It would appear then that the prophets, as men divinely authorised and inspired, were regarded as having a right to dispense with the strict requirements of the law on special and extraordinary occasions, and that, as prompted by the Spirit, it was lawful for them to do that which would be most criminal in persons not so authorised. And this authorised departure, when occasion demanded, from the strict requirements of the law could not but operate beneficially on the public mind. The rigid enforcement of every jot and tittle of the law, on ordinary occasions, might eventually —without the presence of a corrective and counteracting influence — have created a sort of idolatry for the mere letter of the law, and of every ritual detail, as in itself a divine thing. But the permitted departures therefrom by the prophets corrected this tendency, by directing attention more to the spiritual essence of these observances—teaching, as Samuel himself expressly declared on one occasion, that "obedience was better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The diligent reader of the Scripture is aware that this upholding of the spirit above the mere letter of the ritual service was a peculiar function of the prophets, appearing with more and more distinctness as the time advances, until at last the prophets declare with great plainness of speech that the mere ritual service in all its parts, and the most sacred solemnities prescribed by the law, were, in the nakedness of their literal truth—apart from the spiritual influences which should be connected with them—not only unacceptable to the Lord, but abomination in His sight.—*Kitto.*

Samuel's intercession was—I. **The most powerful means of aid.** "Prayer moves the arm that moves the universe." It is the Divinely-appointed means of assistance. It has the promises which are "exceeding great and precious" attached to it. II. **It was a prayer in which they all had a believing interest.** . . . Many hearts united in one exercise. This gives public prayer a wondrous power. III. **It was prayer to their covenant God.** They had just renewed their covenant with God, and accepted Him as theirs. "Cry unto *our* God for us." They knew to whom they addressed their cry. It was to no unknown God or imaginary Deity. IV. **It was prayer for a definite object.** They specified their want—"that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines" (ver. 8). Too many pray in a way so general as to exhibit little interest in what they ask. But Israel had a particular danger, hence they had a particular request. Their prayer arose from a felt necessity. . . . . Prayer should have a fixed, definite object. You should know what you want, and let your felt want urge your earnest cry. V. **It was offered by a sacrifice.** . . . . The sinful can have no claim upon the Holy, nor can they approach without mediation. Hence a system of mediation was established when mercy was revealed. A mediation and an atonement were prefigured in the old economy.—*Steel.*

Ver. 12. What a contrast between the event now recorded at Ebenezer and that recorded as having occurred a few years before at the same place. At that time Israel had the ark with them, the visible sign of God's presence, but the Lord Himself had forsaken them on account of their sins; and Hophni and Phinehas were with the ark, and they were discomfited with a great slaughter, and the priests were slain with the sword, and the ark of God was taken. Now they have not the ark, but they have repented of their sins, and Samuel is with them; and the Lord hearkens to his prayers, and the Philistines are smitten so that they return no more into the coasts of Israel during the days of Samuel, and

Samuel sets up the great stone at Ebenezer. Hence it appears that the outward ordinances of a visible Church are of no avail without holiness in the worshippers, and that in the most distressed condition of the visible Church God can raise up Samuels, and endue them with extraordinary graces, and enable them to do great acts, and give comfort and victory to the Church of God by their means.—*Wordsworth.*

The stone Ebenezer is a monument of those revelations of the might and the grace of a living God, occasioned by sin and penitence, wandering and return, which are the impelling power in the whole political history of the old covenant.—*Lange's Commentary.*

It is of great consequence to cherish lasting and grateful memorials of God's goodness to us, and of our solemn engagements to him. What God has done is too great to be forgotten, and too gracious to be overlooked. I. Look upward, and see God in your history. We should always trace our mercies direct to the hand of God, since, whatever be the agency, He is the source. II. Look backward, and remember past help. The text supposes that help was *needed*, and every Christian knows that his dependence is constant. Mark the long continuance of your mercies. *Hitherto* may be for forty, fifty, or even sixty years. III. Look forward. Thou shalt see greater things than these.—*Thodey,*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13 *and* 14.

VICTORY, REST, AND RESTORATION.

I. One decisive victory brings a long season of rest. This victory at Ebenezer brought peace to Israel for many years, and so the human soul, by a decisive victory over one strong temptation, gains often a long season of rest from the tempter's snares. He gives by such a victory such a proof to the powers of evil of his moral courage that it is deemed hopeless to renew the conflict while the soul remains so strong and watchful. It is written concerning the Son of God, after His decisive victory over the devil in the wilderness, that the tempter "departed from Him for a season" (Luke iv. 13). The total defeat he had experienced told him how vain it would be to renew the assault while the being whom he desired to overthrow remained in His present frame of soul. In all warfare it is best to decide at once who is to be the master of the field by a decisive blow, and if a Christian desires any rest of soul there must be no parleying with his spiritual enemies, he must—with the help of the same God by whom Israel routed the Philistines at Ebenezer—let them know without delay who is to be the conqueror. Even then the devil will "depart for a *season*" only, but these seasons of repose will enable him to gather strength for the next attack.

II. Victory brings restoration of that which has been lost by subjection. When Israel had conquered her oppressors she regained the cities which had been taken from her in the day of her subjection. The human race does not now possess all that belonged to it when God created the first man, and bade him "replenish the earth and subdue it" (Gen. i. 28). God at first "*put all things under his feet*" (Psalm viii. 6). But now it is plain that man is not the absolute lord, either of the earth and the phenomena of nature, or of the animal creation. He has lost his rule by sin. "*We see not yet all things put under him*" (Heb. ii. 8). But when man is restored to his original position in the universe by victory over sin, he will recover his lost rule over material things. There is to be a "*time of restitution*" (Acts iii. 21), when the powers which now hold man in subjection will be finally defeated, and he will recover his former dominion, not only over himself, but over the world and over all the creatures below him in the scale of creation.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The revival of religion has ever had a most important bearing on social and moral improvement. The return of man to God restores him to his brother. Restoration to the earnest and hearty performance of religious duties towards God, leads to a corresponding reformation in relative and political duties. Those countries in Europe which have had the greatest religious reforms, have advanced most in liberty, civilisation, and commerce. They are not trodden by the iron heel of despotism, and they possess the greatest amount of domestic quiet. It was the revival of religion which secured the Protestant succession to England, and many of the liberties we now enjoy. It was the revival of religion that gave such a martyr-roll to the Scottish Covenanters, and led to the revolution settlement of 1688. In Israel every revival of religion was succeeded by national prosperity and political independence.—*Steel.*

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"When Samuel was old."** Many expositors consider that he was now about sixty years of age, others that he was not more than fifty-four. It is plain that he lived for some time after this, and continued to exercise his judgeship. **"He made his sons judges,"** etc. "The reason assigned for the appointment of Samuel's sons as judges is his own advanced age. The inference which we might draw from this alone, namely, that they were simply to support their father in the administration of justice, and that Samuel had no intention of laying down his office, and still less of making the supreme office of judge hereditary in his family, is still more apparent from the fact that they were stationed as judges of the nation in Beersheba, which was on the southern border of Canaan" *(Keil).*

Ver. 2. **"The name of his firstborn was Joel,"** etc. "These names may be taken as indications of the father's pious feeling. The first, *Joel*, 'Jehovah is God,' was, not improbably, a protest against the idolatry of the Israelites. The name of the second son, *Abiah*, 'Jehovah is father,' expresses trust in the fatherhood of God, an idea which hardly appears in the Old Testament except in proper names" *(Translator of Lange's Commentary).* "*Abiah* records doubtless the fervent aspiration of him who devised it as a name, and, we may hope, of many who subsequently adopted it after that endearing and intimate relationship between God and the soul of man, which is truly expressed by the words *father* and *child.* It may be accepted as a proof that believers in ancient days, though they had not possession of the perfect knowledge of 'the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,' or of the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, nevertheless 'received the spirit of adoption,' that God 'sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, whereby they cried Abba, Father'" *(Wilkinson's Personal Names in the Bible).*

Ver. 3. **"His sons walked not in his ways."** "The question may arise, why Samuel was not punished, as Eli, for the misconduct of his sons? But the answer is obvious. Not only was the offence of Samuel's sons of a far less heinous criminality, but Samuel might not know, owing to this distance of Beersheba, anything of their delinquency" *(Jamieson).*

Ver 5. **"Make us a king to judge us like all the nations."** "This request resembles so completely the law of the king in Deut. xvii. 14, that the distinct allusion to it is unmistakable. The custom of expressly quoting the book of the law is met with for the first time in the books of the captivity. The elders simply desired what Jehovah had foretold through His servant Moses, as a thing that would take place in the future and for which He had made provision" *(Kiel).* See also comments on this verse.

Ver. 6. **"The thing displeased Samuel,"** etc. "He did not, therefore, take it amiss that they blamed the wrong-doing of **his** sons, or that they referred to his age, and thus intimated that he was no longer able to bear the whole burden of office" (*Erdmann*). "Personal and family feelings might affect his views of this public movement. But his dissatisfaction arose principally from the proposed change being revolutionary in its character. Though it would not entirely subvert their theocratic government, the appointment of a visible monarch would necessarily tend to throw out of view their unseen King and Head" *(Jamieson).* (See also comments on the verse.)

Ver. 11. "**This will be the manner of the king,**" *i.e.*, "the *right* or *prerogative* which the king would claim, namely, such a king as was possessed by all the other nations, and such an one as Israel desired in the place of its own God-king, *i.e.*, a king who would rule over his people with arbitrary and absolute power" *(Keil)*. "The following is a very just and graphic picture of the despotic governments which anciently were and still are found in the East, and into conformity with which the Hebrew monarchy, notwithstanding the restrictions prescribed by the law, gradually slid. Oriental sovereigns claim a right to the services of any of their subjects at pleasure. The royal equipages throughout the East were generally, as in Persia they still are, preceded and accompanied by a number of attendants on foot. . . . . Cookery, baking, and the kindred works are, in Eastern countries, female employments, and numbers of young women are occupied with these offices in the palaces even of petty princes" *(Jamieson)*.

Ver. 20. "**The first part** of this energetic answer implies that they were well aware of the peculiarity of their civil government, by which their governors were only God's vicegerents—officers chosen and appointed by an unseen power—and they desired a *visible* head. The second part of it expressed a strong preference for a permanent rather than an occasional or temporary magistrate to consult their interests by his domestic administration, and, with regard to their foreign relations, to keep a standing army, ready at all times, under his command, to repel the encroachments or insults of neighbouring states. Perhaps, too, the corruptions that had prevailed to so great an extent under the judges had originated a secret but strong desire to be freed from the government of the priesthood, and they probably expected that, if released from the authority of sacerdotal judges, they would find a regal government less austere and rigid than the old *régime*" *(Jamieson)*.

Ver. 22. "**Go ye every man,**" etc. "We must here read between the lines that Samuel communicated the Divine decision to the people, and, dismissing the elders, took into consideration, in accordance with the Lord's command, the necessary steps for the election of a king" *(Erdmann)*. "He gave them time to reconsider their request, as well knowing that God's permission was a punishment" *(Wordsworth)*. "Such was their reverence for God, and their confidence in His prophet, that, instead of proceeding further to claim the right of popular election, they departed in full and patient reliance on God's time and way of granting their request" *(Jamieson)*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3.

SAMUEL THE FATHER.

Samuel has been called the second Moses of Hebrew history, but though their personal character and their life-work were very much alike, there are some striking contrasts in their individual history. Moses, for instance, was not called to begin his great life-work until he was older than Samuel was at the period of his history to which these verses refer, while this latter servant of God entered upon his special service while he was a child. But he who came last retained his bodily vigour much longer, for at the age of one hundred and twenty years "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deut. xxxiv. 7), while Samuel, when not more than half so old, began to feel the infirmities of age. Moses continued physically fit for service, yet was forbidden by God to serve longer. Samuel became unfit for active service, and yet was permitted to continue it. Both were compelled, the one by Divine command, the other by bodily infirmity, to hand over their work to others, but Moses is happy in finding a suitable successor, while Samuel is obliged to delegate his authority to those who are very unfit to exercise it. Thus the life of the great law-giver and that of the first of the prophets remarkably illustrate the variety of God's dealings with his servants, and lead us to exclaim, when we contemplate His providential leadings, "*His ways are past finding out*" (Rom. xi. 33). The verses teach us—

I. **That time is no respecter of character.** Samuel grew infirm although he was so good. Character is by far the most important thing on earth as well as in heaven, yet the greatest saint as much as the greatest sinner realises in his own experience that "the creature is made subject to vanity" (Rom. viii. 20).

In this respect Samuel, the elect servant of God, was no more highly favoured than the most ungodly man in the kingdom of Israel. The "outer man" of one as well as of the other was "perishing day by day" (2 Cor. iv. 16).

II. But the fact that it is so shows the necessity for the full adoption of the body. (Rom. viii. 23). It must be shown that God is a respecter of persons. That the same destiny should await the body of a saint, which has been an instrument of righteousness, and that of a sinner, which has been altogether devoted to the service of sin, does not accord with our conception of the justice of God. There is that within us which demands that, at some time or other, there should be some difference made, and God in His revealed word tells us that there will be. The body of the saint will have an adoption-day—it will be redeemed from the curse of sin (Rom. viii. 23), and will be "*fashioned like unto the glorious body*" of the Son of God (Phil. iii. 21).

III. Family life is consistent with the highest spiritual attainments and the most devoted spiritual service. Samuel the prophet of God was a husband and father. The highest ideal of man is not that of a solitary creature bound by no human ties, and fulfilling none of the social duties of life. But the most perfect manhood is that which is developed first of all in the head of a household as the father of a family. When God first created man He did not consider him complete until he became a social head, and it is as true now as it was then that a man is not developed on all sides of his character until he takes the position for which God evidently intended him, and fulfils the duties which belong to that position. And this being so, it is obvious that such a life is no hindrance to a man's spiritual growth and to his most entire devotion to the service of God. No man in Hebrew history stands before Samuel in purity of life or singleness of aim; no man, excepting perhaps Moses, was more honoured by God as an intercessor on behalf of others, or was more entirely devoted to the highest welfare of his people, yet he was the head of a household, he was a husband and a father. And if we look back upon the history of the Church of God, we shall find that the greater number of her most devoted servants have not been monks and nuns, but husbands and wives, fathers and mothers.

IV. The most godly men cannot transmit their godliness to their children. Samuel's sons "walked not in his ways." There were several reasons which we should have supposed would lead them to do so. From their earliest days they had been witnesses of their father's godly life, and nothing is more powerful than a good example. Yet in this case it had no influence; all Samuel's integrity was unable to win his sons to the practice of justice. Then there was the position of responsibility in which they were placed. That they held a position in the nation which was only second to that of their father was favourable to the transmission of the virtues which he had displayed as judge of Israel. But this was not the case. We cannot doubt that they also enjoyed the blessing of a father's prayers and instruction. If Samuel was in the habit of bringing all Israel before God in prayer, it is certain that he did not omit to make special intercession for his own children; if he ceased not to instruct and warn the entire nation, it is most unlikely that he failed to acquaint his children with the law of God—with His dealings with the nation in the past—with the judgment that he had been called to foretell concerning the sons of Eli, and with the great promises which had been made to Israel if they were faithful to their privileges. But he finds himself confronted with the fact that a holy seed is born, not of the blood of prophets, nor of the will of man, but of God. Great as are the moral advantages of being born into a godly family, more than the mere fact of being so born, and of being surrounded by every holy influence, is needed to subdue the will of fallen man, and make him a servant of God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. Samuel began his acquaintance with God early, and continued it long; he began it in his long coats, and continued to his grey hairs: he judged Israel all the days of his life. God doth not use to put off His old servants, their age endeareth them to Him the more; if we be not unfaithful to Him, He cannot be unconstant to us.—*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 3. It is amazing how this sin of covetousness perverts the moral faculties. Gold, unlawfully got, sears the conscience. Some of the loftiest minds have been degraded by this sin. Perhaps there was not a greater man in his own age, or in any age, than Lord Bacon. He is the father of modern philosophy, and revolutionised the inquiries of the schools. . . . His works must ever be read with profit, and they contain a vast store of wisdom expressed in the most felicitous language. Yet, strange to relate, Lord Bacon was one of the most unscrupulous lawyers, and one of the most disreputable judges that ever sat upon the English bench. . . . This philosopher, who had written so much in praise of virtue, was impeached by the House of Commons, and found guilty of receiving bribes to the amount of £100,100! "This glimpse of the rise and fall of a great man," says Dr. Tweedie, "proclaims aloud the insufficiency of all but the grace and truth of God to keep a man morally erect.—*Steel.*

Perhaps Israel had never thought of a king, if Samuel's sons had not been unlike their father. Who can promise himself holy children, when the loins of a Samuel and the education in the temple yielded monsters? It is not likely that good Samuel was faulty in that indulgence for which his own mouth had denounced God's judgments against Eli; yet this holy man succeeds Eli in his cross, as well as in his place, though not in his sin; and is afflicted with a wicked succession. God will let us find that grace is by gift, not by inheritance. I fear Samuel was too partial to nature in the surrogation of his sons. I do not hear of God's allowance to this act; if this had been God's choice as well as his, it had been like to have received more blessing. . . . Even the best heart may be blinded by affection.—*Bp. Hall.*

I. The children of good men do not always walk in their parents' ways. It was not the peculiar affliction of Samuel. . . . It was early seen that grace was not hereditary. In the family of Adam, there was a Cain, a murderer; in that of Noah, a Ham, who mocked his father; in that of Abraham, an Ishmael, a scoffer at religion; in that of Isaac, a profane Esau. An incestuous Reuben, and a bloody Simeon and Levi, distressed the heart of good old Jacob; two drunkards, Nadab and Abihu, were found in the family of Aaron, "the saint of God;" and Hophni and Phinehas brought disgrace and ruin upon the house of Eli . . . . . **II. The frequent recurrence of this fact need excite no surprise in those who believe in the corruptions of human nature and the sovereignty of Divine Grace.** . . . . The children of the godly are "by nature the children of wrath, even as others." . . . Something more is necessary than parents can confer, a change of heart, which God alone can accomplish. . . . . **III. Causes why the children of godly parents do not often walk in their parents' ways.** Although this is to be accounted for by the corruption of human nature, there are certain subordinate causes . . . . 1. *The untender and uncircumspect conversation of parents.* . . . . They will more readily copy what is bad in your example, than what is good and praiseworthy . . . . the bad example will be followed, the good advice neglected. 2. *Faults in their education.* Such as unjust partiality, as in that of Isaac for Esau, and of Rebekah for Jacob. . . . Or undue indulgence, which seems to have been the error of David, and the ruin of his son Adonijah. . . . Excessive severity

is an error not less fatal, and perhaps as common. 3. *The influence of bad company and bad example in others.* The ruin of multitudes has proceeded from want of caution in this matter.—*Peddie.*

Ver. 4. The unanimity of the people, even as exemplified in their desire for a king, was a result of Samuel's activity. His former activity was an excellent preparation for royalty. The consciousness of religious and civil union was powerfully re-awakened by his means. An able king had only to reap what he had sown.—*Hengstenberg.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4—22.

A King Desired and Granted.

I. The generality of mankind prefer the visible to the invisible. There have been men in all ages of the world who have chosen as their portion that which is unseen in preference to what is seen, and they have done so on the most reasonable and substantial grounds. The Invisible King had more power to influence the actions—to control the choice—of Moses than the visible and mighty monarch of Egypt. He was so ruled by a desire to serve Him whom he had never seen that he counted the wrath of Pharaoh as nothing in comparison. In the day of battle his eye was not fixed upon the visible enemy, but it was raised to that unseen friend whose help he sought for the people whom he led. His whole life was an "enduring as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). Samuel also was ruled by an abiding sense of the presence of the Unseen King. To Him he cried in the day of his people's danger, and with reference to Him he regulated his whole life. And in the present day, as in all past days, there are those who are ruled, not by the things which are seen and temporal, but by those which are unseen and eternal, who "*endure as seeing Him who is invisible.*" But these have always been in the minority—most men, like Israel of old, prefer the *visible* and the *seeming* to the *invisible* and the *real.* *Those who have this preference justify it because it makes them like the majority.* "*Nay,*" said Israel, "but we will have a king to reign over us, that *we also may be like all the nations*" (vers. 19, 20). The influence of numbers has always had great weight with mankind. They do not like to be singular, and they find a reason for doing what they do, and for having what they desire, in the fact that the generality of men have and do it. The great majority of the Hebrew nation were unwilling to be different from the nations around them; those nations had a visible king, and although he was but a man like themselves, Israel desired to have such a king rather than render allegiance to God only as their King.

II. Even when a desired thing is shown to be injurious, men will often persist in desiring it. Sometimes a physician finds a patient who is so self-willed that he will persist in desiring food which has been proved to be injurious to him. And so a godless soul has sometimes the injurious consequences of a certain course plainly set before him, and yet persists in his determination to continue in it. Samuel, like a wise moral physician, laid before Israel the consequences of persisting in their desire to have a king like the nations. But, although he plainly pointed out to them the bondage to which they would subject themselves by gratifying such a desire, they refused to relinquish it. In the face of the remonstrances of one whom they knew desired their real welfare, they held to their determination simply because it was theirs.

III. God, rather than force the human will, will grant petitions which displease Him. God will not force any man to take His yoke. If men persist

in desiring a heavier one, He will often grant their desire. This was more than once the case with the Hebrew nation. He once wrought a miracle to meet their wishes, when they incurred His deep displeasure by desiring their own way in preference to His. Is was an act of Divine judgment when He "gave them quails to the full" (Numb. xi. 33), and in the instance before us God granted their desire, but "He gave them a king in His anger" (Hosea xiii. 11), and Israel soon found that the gratification of their self-will brought its own punishment, and that their self-imposed yoke was a very different one from that which their Divine King had laid upon them. But God leaves men free to choose or to reject His guidance. He will have none but voluntary subjects.

IV. In the time of displeasure and perplexity we should take the cause of both to God. Samuel, in this day of disappointment and uncertainty, "cried unto the Lord;" and every child of God should do the same. He is prompted to this act by a spiritual instinct, and encouraged in it by the Divine promises. It is an instinct in human nature to turn to the strong in seasons of weakness, and to those who are wiser than we are in the season of perplexity. The child runs to the parent for help, and the inexperienced turn to those who have more wisdom than they have when they feel that their own wisdom is insufficient to guide them. In times of great extremity almost every human creature instinctively cries out for supernatural help, but when a man has a closer relation to God than that which is common to every human creature—when he can look up to Him and cry, Abba, Father—he not only turns his eye upward as naturally as a flower opens its petals to the sun, but he is encouraged and emboldened to do so by the Divine promises of succour. God has commanded His children to "*call upon Him in the day of trouble*," and has promised them *deliverance* (Psa. l. 15). "*Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: . . . . He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him*" (Psa. xci. 14, 15). Samuel's experience at this time is an illustration of the truth of these Divine promises.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 5. The request of Israel brings before us—**I. A melancholy view of the progress of degeneracy in a community.** Looking at their history from the time of their entrance into Canaan, on the whole the scene presented is that of successive generations rising up to depart farther and farther from God, and now we have the dismal consummation in their effort to destroy, as far as they were concerned, that peculiar and interesting link between themselves and God which existed in the fact that besides being to them, as He is to all creatures, their Supreme Ruler, He condescended to act as such in a direct and immediate form, standing actually, and to all intents and purposes, in the same relation to them as that which an earthly sovereign sustains towards his subjects. . . . . It was the sin of the fathers living over again, but with greater intensity, in the persons of the children. This view of the case is, in a high degree, admonitory. None of us perhaps think enough of the connexion between ourselves and the future, and yet, when we do, there is much that may well fill our minds with awe. . . . Each age exerts a very considerable influence on that which succeeds it, and the men of any particular age are responsible in a very large and affecting measure for the characteristics of the period which may come after them. . . . . In looking at the clamorous assembly which the narrative brings before us, we cannot recognise in that crowd the immediate descendants of a race of God-fearing fathers and of God-honouring mothers. **II. It teaches us the perilousness of allowing our thoughts to run in an improper direc-**

tion, and our wishes to centre upon a wrong object. And this because of the *absorbing effect of one wrong thought*, and its consequent power to throw into oblivion all those counteracting thoughts and objects which from any other source might be suggested. . . . Trace the progress of this one wrong desire in Israel. Was there nothing to be said on the other side? Is it not exceedingly easy to conceive of the counteracting effect which might have been presented to such a wish by *a recollection of their actual privileges at the moment?* There is a matchless sublimity about the very idea of a *theocracy*. But if its sublimity did not appeal to their moral sense, its peculiar advantageousness might have appealed to their self-regard. No other form of government could be compared with it for beneficial results to its subjects. For consider what it involved—the equal accessibleness of the Sovereign to all His subjects—the certainty of having the best counsel under all circumstances—the largest resources, both of power and skill, at their command—the impossibility of wrong motives affecting the Sovereign's acts—the freedom from the ordinary burdens of government when He was king who could say, "Every beast in the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." . . Nor did they admit another recollection which might well have offered the strongest contradiction to their one wrong desire, even that of the *faithfulness and the loving-kindness with which God, as their King, had ever treated them*. . . . Beware of the first misdirection of thought. Be sure you are right *at first* in your plans and purposes, because afterwards, by reason of the very force by which wrong thoughts indulged exclude all suggestions to the contrary, it may be too late to alter.—*Miller.*

Ver. 6. A beautiful example of prayer to obtain the composure of ruffled feelings and to have the judgment directed aright by God's Holy Spirit, when it is in danger of being overswayed by personal motives.—*Biblical Commentary.*

In this there was a twofold ungodly element. (1). They desired a king instead of the God-established and nobly-attested judge Samuel. . . . The scheme is characterised as an injustice against Samuel, and therefore a sin against the Lord who sent him (vers. 7, 8). (2). At the bottom of the people's desire for a king lay the delusion that God was powerless to help them, that the reason of their subjection was not their sin, but a fault in the constitution, that the kingdom would be an aid *in addition to* God. This point of view appears oftener in the narrative than the first (Isa. x. 18, 19; xii.).—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 7. It was not, then, the mere desire for reform in civil polity. It was the outburst in a new form of an ancient sin; it was a new disguise for a well-known delinquency; it was of a piece with their frequent backsliding. Ungodliness was at the root of their discontent. . . . . God, who judgeth the heart, recognised the former disobedience in this new request. How different it seemed, yet how radically the same! Man would have judged otherwise and imputed the desire to other motives; God, who is infallible, attributed it to the same. It is well to consider our motives for conduct, this would enable us to detect an old sin in a new form.—*Steel.*

The condescension of this answer is very remarkable. Samuel's wounded feelings are soothed by being reminded of the continual ingratitude of the people to God Himself, upon whom, in fact, a greater slight was put by this request for a king "like the nations," than upon Samuel. It is in the spirit of our Lord's saying to the apostles, "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his lord" (Matt. x. 24, comp. John xv. 18, 20).—*Biblical Commentary.*

Such an answer sounds at first most strange, most perplexing! Hearken unto them, for they have rejected me.

Yield to them, because they are doing a worse thing than you supposed they were doing. . . . . No contradiction can seem greater. And yet no Jewish statesman or prophet could do the work that was given him to do, could be God's faithful witness, if he did not enter into the very heart of this contradiction, if he did not mould his own conduct according to the deep truth that was implied in it. His impulse was to maintain the order of things which he found established in his day. He believed that order was God's order; he dared not refer it to any lower source. He administered that order in this faith; if it forsook him, he became careless and corrupt. Could God's order then be changed? Was He not, by His very nature, the Unchangable? Was it not the highest duty to make the people feel that this was His character? Was it not thus that their own frivolity and passion for change would be corrected? When the impulse passes into reasoning you cannot easily detect a flaw in it; and yet it was stronger still while it was still an impulse and did not pass into reasoning. Nothing but prayer to the unchangable God could show wherein both were false and might lead to falsehood. The unchangableness of God is not to be confounded with the rigidness of a rule or a system. If it is so confounded, the purpose and nature of His government are forgotten. He—the Perfect and Absolute Will—has created beings with wills, beings made in His own image. He educates them; He desires that they should know His Will, that is to say, Himself. They are to learn what they themselves are, what they would make of themselves, what He would make of them, partly by an experience of their own wilfulness, partly by results which He brings to pass in spite of that wilfulness, yea, by means of it. This is the explanation of the paradox . . . "Let them know what the general of armies, whom they crave for as a deliverer, will do to bring them into deeper bondage, but do not resist a desire which has in it a deeper meaning than you know, which will produce immediate sorrows, but in which is hidden a Divine purpose for the good and not for the destruction of your people." In a very remarkable sense, then, the *vox populi* was the *vox Dei*, even when the two voices seemed most utterly out of harmony. The prophet was not merely to notice the outward and obvious discord between them; he was to listen with purged ears till he found where one became really the echo of the other.—*Maurice.*

The sin of Israel did *not* consist simply in wishing to have a king. God had promised to Abraham that *kings* should come out of him (Gen. xvii. 6), and also to Jacob (Gen. xxxv. 11). The Holy Spirit had prophesied by Jacob that "the *sceptre* should not depart from Judah until Shiloh come" (Gen. xlix. 10); and Balaam, that a "*sceptre* should arise out of Israel" (Numb. xxiv. 17); and God had provided certain laws for the *kingdom* which should arise in Israel (Deut. xvii. 15-20). But their sin consisted in *not waiting* patiently for God's time, when He might think fit to *give* them a *king*. It consisted in not leaving the season of the kingdom and the choice of a king in His hands. It consisted in not asking Samuel to inquire of God whether the time had arrived when they might have a king; and in presuming that they were themselves the best judges of what conduced to their own welfare, and needed not to ask counsel of God. St. Paul notices this in his historical address to the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia. "*God gave* unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, and afterwards *they desired* a king" (Acts xiii. 20, 21). It consisted in the unthankfulness and discontent of the people, dissatisfied with their present condition, when "God was their King." It consisted in an eager desire to be "like all other nations," who had earthly kings; whereas they ought to have deemed it a high privilege to be *unlike* other nations, in that they had been separated from all other people (Lev. xx. 26) and chosen from out of

other nations to be a *peculiar treasure* to God *above all people*, a *holy nation*, a kingdom of priests (Exod. xix. 5, 6), "a special people unto the Lord their God, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. vii. 6). They thought lightly of this prerogative, and, like a national Esau, they profanely bartered their birthright for what they deemed a temporal benefit. —*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 8. Old sins are not forgotten with God, if they are all the time kept up and not repented of (Exod. xxxii. 34).—*Wuertemb. Bible.*

Ver. 18. *Cries that will not be heard.* 1. Self-will often brings us unto distress. 2. This distress makes us cry to the Lord. 3. Such cries the Lord does not promise to hear.—*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*

These words should make us tremble. For they teach us that after having for some time followed with delight the wanderings of our own heart against the advice of our counsellors, we shall some day find ourselves involved in many evils. This often happens to men. One binds himself in one way, and one in another—each walks according to the desires of his heart, and in the way which he has marked out for himself, and is followed by sorrows which compel him to cry to heaven for help. But God will not hear these cries, unless they are the fruit of a true repentance, and then the ills that are suffered in the path which has been chosen are the just punishment for our wilfulness in having entered it.—*De Sacy.*

Ver. 19. Like little children, the passions of a people are blind to the future. . . . Thus the sinner *will* have his desire, though it imperil his soul for ever. The avaricious *will* have gold, though it become his idol, and his immortal spirit worship the golden calf. The inebriate *will* have his drink, though he degrade his being, blast his character, beggar his family, and damn his soul.—*Steel.*

We will have a king. Why then, you *shall*, saith God, for a mischief to you (Hosea xiii. 11). You shall have your will, and then I will have mine another while. (See the like, Hosea xiii. 11.)—*Trapp.*

Ver. 21. Samuel can go back to God with the same uprightness as he had come from that sacred place. The tides of popular feeling did not bear him away. He could stand alone in his devotedness to God, if the people should all reject the word of the Most High. . . . He was willing to abide by the Divine decision. His will was according to God's. High attainment for a sinful man!—*Steel.*

Ver. 22. The history of the world cannot produce another instance in which a public determination was formed to appoint a king, and yet no one proposed either himself or any other person to be king, but referred the determination entirely to God. Ambition of royal authority certainly was not the motive in the leading men who supported this measure. The whole of their proceedings, even in this highly improper determination, shows how fully convinced they were that the law of Moses was from God, and that, even in appointing a king, His directions must be observed, or rather, that the decision must be referred implicitly to God Himself.—*Scott.*

Few who rebuke so sharply and are not followed, escape the animosity of the people, but this man of God conducted himself with such rectitude and godliness as to come forth from the ordeal with the confidence and respect of all the people. . . . There are times when such consistent piety would have made him a martyr; nevertheless, it insures respect, and is most likely to invest its possessor with an invulnerable character in the esteem of the very people who often refused his counsel, but had been often benefited by his prayers.—*Steel.*

Samuel sorrowfully dismissed them to their homes, that he might have

time to take the necessary measures for effecting this great change. . . It was not the wish of the prophet to leave them to all the consequences of their infatuation. With wise and noble patriotism it was henceforth his solicitude, while accomplishing their wishes, to save them, as far as possible, from the consequences they declared themselves willing to incur. And if, in the result, we find the Hebrew monarchy less absolute than generally among eastern nations—if the people retained possession of more of their national and social rights than in other eastern kingdoms—and if the strong exertion of kingly power was, in after ages, resented by them as a wrong instead of being recognised as a just prerogative, it is entirely owing to the sagacious care and forethought of Samuel, acting under Divine direction, in securing from utter destruction at the outset the liberties which the people so wilfully cast into the fire. In fact, the more we contemplate the character of Samuel, the more its greatness grows upon us, and the more distinctly we recognise the most truly illustrious character in Hebrew history since Moses.—*Kitto.*

This history exhibits the relation of the Divine will to the human will, when the latter stands sinfully opposed to the former. God never destroys the freedom of the human will. He leaves it to its free self-determination, but when it has turned away from His will, seeks to bring it back by the revelation of His word. If this does not succeed, human perversity must nevertheless minister to the realisation of the plans of His kingdom and salvation, and also, in its evil consequences, bring punishment, according to His righteous law, on the sin which man thus freely commits.—*Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Now, there was a man of Benjamin.**" "The elaborate genealogy of the Benjamite Kish, and the minute description of the figure of his son Saul, are intended to indicate at the very outset the importance to which Saul attained in relation to the people of Israel. *Kish* was the son of *Abiel:* this is in harmony with chap. xiv. 51. But when, on the other hand, it is stated in 1 Chron. viii. 33, ix. 39, that *Ner* begat *Kish*, the difference may be reconciled in the simplest manner, on the assumption that the *Ner* mentioned there is not the father, but the grandfather, or a still more remote ancestor of *Kish*, as the intervening members are frequently passed over in the genealogies *(Kiel).* "**A mighty man of power,**" rather, "*a rich well-to-do man*" *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 2. "**Saul.**" "Heb. *Shâul; i.e., desired,* asked for: his name was an omen of his history" *(Wordsworth).* "**From his shoulders and upward.**" "It is evident that he must have been only a little under seven feet high" *(Jamieson).* See also note on chap. x. 23.

Ver. 3. "**The asses of Kish,**" etc. The probability is that the family of Kish, according to the immemorial usage of Oriental shepherds in the purely pastoral regions, had let the animals roam at large during the grazing season, at the close of which messengers were dispatched in search of them. Such travelling searches are common; and as each owner has his stamp marked on his cattle, the mention of it to the shepherds he meets gradually leads to the discovery of the strayed animals. This ramble of Saul's had nothing extraordinary in it, except its *superior* directions and issue, which turned its uncertainty into certainty" *(Jamieson).* "The superintendence of the cattle was anciently an occupation held in much esteem. It was regarded as the proper office of a son, and by no means implies the smallness of Kish's possessions or his want of servants. . . . . Among cattle in the East at all times, and especially ere horses were used for riding, asses were esteemed of much importance. . . . . If such an incident now happened in Palestine, it would be at once concluded that the animals had been stolen, and it speaks well for the state of society in the times of Samuel, that this suspicion never crossed the mind of Saul or his father" *(Kitto).*

Ver. 4. "And as he passed through Mount Ephraim," etc. "As Saul started in any case from Gibeah of Benjamin, his own home (chap. x. 10-26, etc.), *i.e.* the present *Tuliel el Phul*, which was an hour or an hour and a half to the north of Jerusalem, and went thence into the mountains of Ephraim, he no doubt took a north-westerly direction, so that he crossed the boundary of Benjamin somewhere between Bireh and Atarah, and passing through the crest of the mountains of Ephraim, came out into the land of Shalisha. *Shalisha* is unquestionably the country round *Baal-shalisha* (2 Kings iv. 42), which was situated, according to Eusebius, fifteen Roman miles to the north of Lydda, and was therefore probably the country to the west of Jiljilia, where three different wadys run into one large wady, called Kurawa; and according to the probable conjecture of Thenius, it was from this fact that the district received the name of *Shalisha*, or *Three-land*. . . . Since they went on from Shaalim into the land of Benjamin, and then still further into the land of Zuph, on the south-west of Benjamin, they probably turned eastwards from Shalishah into the country where we find *Beni Mussah* and *Beni Salem* marked upon Robinson's and V. de Velde's maps, and where we must therefore look for the land of *Shaalim*, that they might proceed thence to explore the land of Benjamin from the north-east to the south-west." *(Keil).*

Ver. 5. "Land of Zuph." Nothing is certainly known of the land of Zuph, but "we may infer with certainty that it was on the south-west of the tribe-territory of Benjamin, from the fact that, according to chap. x. 2, Saul and his companion passed Rachel's tomb on their return thence to their own home, and then came to the border of Benjamin." *(Keil).*

Ver. 6. "This city." Some commentators suppose that this city was Ramah, Samuel's residence; but Keil, Jamieson, Wordsworth, and others, consider that several circumstances are against this supposition, especially the mention of Rachel's sepulchre in chap. x. 2. **"Peradventure he can show us our way,"** etc. "We may fancy that the man and his master either entertained a very high sense of the importance of their asses, or a very low one of the prophetic office; but the man would scarcely have reached this conclusion unless it were notorious that Samuel had often been consulted respecting things lost or stolen. We may therefore infer that, at the commencement of the prophetic office in the person of Samuel, it was usual, in order to encourage confidence in their higher vaticinations, and to prevent that dangerous resort to heathen divinations, for the prophets to afford counsel when required in matters of private concernment." *(Kitto).*

Ver. 7. "What shall we bring the man?" "Then, as now in the East, it would have been the height of rudeness and indecorum for anyone to present himself before a superior or even an equal, without some present, more or less, according to his degree, not by any means as a fee or a bribe, but in testimony of his homage, respect, or compliments" *(Kitto).* "This does not exclude the supposition that the prophets depended for support on these voluntary gifts." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 8. "Fourth part of shekel of silver." "Rather more than sixpence. Contrary to our western notions, money is in the East the most acceptable form in which a present can be made to a man of rank." *(Jamieson).*

Ver. 9. "These words are manifestly a gloss inserted in the older narrative to explain the use of the term *Seer*. One among many instances which prove how the very letter of the contemporary narrative was preserved by those who in later times compiled the histories." *(Biblical Commentary).* **"Prophet." "Seer."** "There has been much discussion as to the distinction between these two words; and it is not easy to decide the question, for in some passages, as here, they appear to be used synonymously, or as applied to the same individuals, whereas in others they are contrasted (1 Chr. xxix. 29, Isa. xxix. 10, xxx. 10). The first, from the verb *to see*, sufficiently shows that the power of the person arose from mental vision. The second, from a verb *to bubble up*, as a spring or fountain, signifies that the message which the *Nabi* (prophet) delivered was derived from God; and hence it is always rendered a "prophet." Accordingly *Havernick* (Introduction to the Old Testament) considers the first term as marking the receptive act of revelation, and the second as describing the office of the prophets—that of communicating the word of God. Hence, after the institution of the schools by Samuel, it became the official title of the prophets; and the two functions were united in, or performed by the same person." *(Jamieson).* "This statement has special interest in connection with the history of the prophetic work in Israel. . . . . The change of name from *Roeh* (seer) to *Nabi* (prophet) and *Chozeh* (gazer) had its ground probably in the development of the religious constitution. Up to some time before the author of "Samuel" wrote, the non-sacerdotal, non-Levitical religious teacher was one distinguished by seeing visions, or by seeing into the will of God. This is God's definition of the prophet in Numb. xii. 6; it is involved in 1 Samuel iii. 1. 15, and in the visions of the patriarchs. The Law of Moses was the complete and sufficient guide for life and worship, and it was only in special individual matters that the divine direction was given, and then it was through the medium of a vision. He who saw the vision was a *Roeh*, and it was natural enough that he should be consulted by the people about

many matters. But in process of time the mechanicalness and deadness to which the legal ritual constantly tended called forth an order of men who expounded and enforced the spirituality of the law, speaking as God bade them, speaking for God, entering as a prominent element into the religious life of the nation. He who thus spake was a *Nabi*, and as he, too, might have visions, he was sometimes called *Chozeh* the gazer. . . . . As this speaker for God gradually took the place of the old seer of visions, the word *Nabi* replaced *Roeh* in popular usage. It seems that the change began in or about Samuel's time, and was completed about three centuries later, Roeh still maintaining itself in the language, though rarely used. On the other hand, Nabi may have been used infrequently in early times in reference to Abraham and Moses, and have become afterwards the common term, or the occurrence of the word in the Pentateuch may be the transference of a late word to earlier times." *(Transr. of Lange's Commentary).*

Ver. 12. **"High place."** Of such "*Bamoth*," or holy places on heights, where the people assembled for sacrifice and prayer, there were several during the unquiet times of the judges, especially after the central Sanctuary at Shiloh ceased to exist, till the building of the Temple (comp. vii. 9; x. 8; xiii. 8; xvi. 2, etc.), as, indeed, the patriarchs sacrificed on high places (Gen. xii. 8). It was not till after the building of the Temple that the high-place worship, which easily degenerated into idolatry, was completely done away with" (2 Kings xxiii. 4-23) *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 13. **"To eat."** This was a sacrificial feast following a peace offering.

Ver. 15. **"Told Samuel in his ear,"** lit., *had uncovered his ear.* See on chap. iii. 7.

Vers. 16, 17. "The reason here assigned for the establishment of a monarchy is by no means at variance with the displeasure which God had expressed to Samuel at the desire of the people for a king; since this displeasure had reference to the state of heart from which the desire had sprung." *(Keil)*

Ver. 17. **"This same shall reign,"** literally shall *restrain.* "This characteristises his government as a sharp and strict one." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 19. **"Go up before me."** "Letting a person go in front was a sign of high esteem." *(Keil).*

Ver. 20. **"On whom is all the desire of Israel,"** not all that Israel desires, but all that Israel possesses of what is precious or worth desiring. See Hag. ii. 7 *(Keil).*

Ver. 21. **"The smallest of the tribes,"** etc. "The tribe of Benjamin, originally the smallest of all the tribes (Numb. i.), if Ephraim and Manasseh are reckoned as one tribe, had been nearly annihilated by the civil war recorded in Judges xx. It had, of course, not recovered from that calamity in the time of Samuel." (*Biblical Commentary*).

Ver. 22. **"He brought them into the parlour,"** *i.e.*, the apartment set apart for the most distinguished guests, the rest of the people no doubt encamped in the open air.

Ver. 24. **"The shoulder."** "If it was the right shoulder, then Samuel, to whose share it fell, as performing the functions of priest (Lev. vii. 32), gave Saul of his own portion; or, if it were the left shoulder, then he admitted Saul to the next share after his own." *(Wordsworth).*

Ver. 25. **"Upon the top of the house."** "Not surely for privacy, as some expound it; for the house-top was the proverbial expression for publicity (Isa. xv. 3; Luke xii. 3), but in order to let all the people of the city see the honour done to the stranger by the great prophet." *(Biblical Commentary).*

Ver. 26. **"Samuel called Saul from the top of the house,"** rather *to* the top of the house. Saul was most likely sleeping on the roof, a common sleeping place in summer in the East, and Samuel called to him from below within the house.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-14.

Saul's Search for the Lost Asses.

I. This narrative reveals the action of the natural and the supernatural in the Divine Providence. There is no part of the globe on which we live that is not under the influence of the sun—the centre of the solar system. If there are caves and valleys where no sunshine can enter, the daylight finds its way into them, or if they are closed against the light, they are still influenced by

the sun's gravitating power, for there is no particle of the globe that is hid from this hold of the sun upon it. And as surely as there is an all-pervading influence from the sun upon the entire material globe, so there is a providence from which no creature of God is shut out—there is no thing nor person upon whom His providence has not a hold. Each blade of grass is fed with its drop of dew under the supervision of its Creator—the lilies are each clothed by His hand, and He notes each sparrow that falls to the ground as well as the downfall of the mightiest monarch. When we read the narrative before us we can but be impressed with the fact that there is a providence ruling in the earth. But the Providence of God embraces both natural and supernatural agencies. There are incidents in human life which appear to us to be the natural outcome of ordinary circumstances, and some such incidents are related in this narrative. No farmer would think it a marvel if his cattle strayed beyond the boundaries of home nor would a fisherman be surprised if his boat now and then slipped its cable and drifted a little way from its anchorage. If the child of some fond parent is lost in the great city no one thinks that it is a supernatural occurrence. Although the cattle do not stray without God's knowledge, and no boat that slips from its anchorage, or child that wanders from its home, is outside His providence, yet these are all events which happen within the circle of His ordinary and every-day working and permission. And so it was an occurrence inside God's ordinary providence that the father of Israel's king-elect should lose his asses. Although they were not lost without the Divine knowledge, and there was an intention that their loss should be the first link in a chain which included supernatural elements, the event itself was a common occurrence. But God intended that a great finding should come out of a comparatively insignificant loss. The straying of the asses was linked with the revelation to Samuel, and this last event was of a supernatural character. The first link of a chain-cable is a long way from the last, but they are intimately connected, and form parts of one whole. The one may be above the water, and in sight, and the other next to the anchor in the bed of the river, but they are both parts of the same chain. So the supernatural revelation to Samuel was the link out of sight, and in the region of the higher law of God's working, and the loss of the asses was the visible link in the lower law, but the one was as much a part of the chain which brought Saul to his kingdom as the other was. Thus the natural and supernatural are interlaced in the Providence of God to bring to pass His purposes, as the soul and body of a man are linked together in order to enable him to live his life upon the earth.

II. The narrative reveals to us some of the characteristics of the first king of Israel. 1. *His personal appearance was a reflection of the nation's desire.* When we see a man's ideal we know what it is that he considers of most value, his ideal is a mirror which tells us what he regards as of highest worth. If a nation is free to elect its own representatives, we can learn what qualities or gifts in men it esteems most highly by becoming acquainted with those whom it has chosen. Although Israel did not choose their own king, God gave them one who was a mirror of their minds—one who revealed what they held in highest esteem. They did not want a man like Samuel—a man of moral and spiritual force whose prayer was more invincible than Saul's sword. They desired a king unlike God, one whom they could see when they went forth to battle, and who would at least impress their enemies by a commanding bodily presence. And God gave them their hearts' desire in this "goodly young man, who, so far as stature went, was "higher than any of the people." 2. *Saul had also some good points in his character.* He was a man who honoured his father. Kish said to Saul his son, "Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses," and he appears to have obeyed

without demur. Obedience to human parents, when they do not require anything wrong, is pleasing to God and an indication of some moral excellence under any circumstances. But the obedience is more praiseworthy when the child has arrived at manhood, and still more so if the man is qualified for higher employment, and yet sinks his own will in that of his parent, and performs some lowly duty in obedience to his desire. Saul, though a grown man, and evidently fitted for a more dignified employment, goes willingly to seek lost asses in obedience to his father's desire, and thus shows that he possesses a truly filial spirit. He was "faithful in that which was least" (Luke xvi. 10). He was also evidently desirous to spare no pains to carry out his father's wishes. He pursued his journey from place to place over many weary miles, until all the provisions and nearly all the money with which he and his servant had set out were exhausted (vers. 7, 8). He did not content himself with such a search as might have contented many men and have fulfilled the letter of his father's injunction, he was intent upon obeying the spirit of it also, and only thought of giving up the search when he knew his lengthened absence would cause anxiety at home. In this, too, he showed himself as mindful of his father's feelings, and as unwilling to give him trouble, as he was ready to obey him. Many a young man, when he had once set out upon such a journey, would have consulted his own fancy and his own ease in his return, but Saul was of a better sort. His willingness to be advised by his servant is also an indication that he was not a haughty, proud young man—that he did not look upon those who were beneath him in station as necessarily inferior to him in wisdom. All that we read of Saul in this chapter is indicative of a good natural disposition.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 1-14. *The first test to which God subjects His servant.* It embraces two main points. (1). Whether with certain natural talents and advantages which God has given us he will in humility and quiet obedience do the work enjoined upon him. (2). Whether when his work proves useless he will seek help from the seer of God. The Most High God appoints a *testing* for His servant Saul, and so whoever is summoned to the service of God knows that for him also there must be a *testing.*—*Disselhoff.*

Vers. 1, 2. Samuel is the chief figure of the transitional period which opens the history of the monarchy. But there is another upon whom the character of the epoch is impressed still more strongly—who belongs to this period especially, and could belong to no other. Saul is the first king of Israel. In him that new and strange idea became impersonated. In him we feel that we have made a marked advance in the history from the patriarch and nomadic state, which concerns us mainly by its contrast with our own, to that fixed and settled state which has more or less pervaded the whole condition of the Church ever since. But, although in outward form Saul belonged to the new epoch, although even in spirit he from time to time threw himself into it, yet on the whole he is a product of the earlier condition. Whilst Samuel's existence comprehends and overlaps both periods in the calmness of a higher elevation, the career of Saul derives its peculiar interest from the fact that it is the eddy in in which both streams converge. In that vortex he struggles—the centre of events and persons greater than himself; and in that struggle he is borne down and lost. . . . He is, we may say, the first character of Jewish history which we are able to trace out in any minuteness of detail He is the first with regard to whom we can make out that whole connection of a

large family—father, uncle, cousins, sons, grandsons—which, as a modern historian (Palgrave) well observes, is so important in making us feel that we have acquired a real acquaintance with any personage of past times.—*Stanley.*

Ver. 2. Saul was mighty in person, overlooking the rest of the people in stature, no less than he should do in dignity. The senses of the Israelites could not but be well pleased for the time, howsoever their hearts were afterward: when men are carried with outward shows, it is a sign that God means them a delusion.—*Bishop Hall.*

Vers. 3, 4. Since, from God's concealment of the future, we cannot tell what He may intend to do with us and by us, it is our duty to hold ourselves in readiness to undertake any service which He may require us to render, to enter upon any position He may call upon us to fill. When we see Saul taken from the quiet discharge of the common duties of life, and placed upon the throne of Israel, we see the truth set forth—in an extreme case we admit, but therefore only the more impressively—that it is utterly impossible for us to predict what God may have in store for us. Of all the possible or probable events which might have happened to Saul, that of becoming king would most certainly have been set down by himself as least likely to occur. . . . . And it would not be difficult for us to fix on positions and duties, respecting which, if a fellow-creature were to intimate even the most distant prospect of their ever forming part of our personal history, we should have our reply ready at once, that it was as little likely as that we should be called to fill the throne of these realms. Yet these may be actually in store for us. . . . . But there are certain qualifications which are requisite alike for all positions, and which render us, in a good measure, ready for any service. Such, for instance, are diligence and fidelity in meeting the claims of our present condition, whatever it may be.—*Miller.*

Ver. 6. Most people would rather be told their fortune than told their duty; how to be rich than how to be saved. If it were the business of men of God to direct for the recovery of lost asses, they would be consulted much more than they are, now that it is their business to direct for the recovery of lost souls.—*Matt. Henry.*

Great is the benefit of a wise and religious attendant; such a one puts us into those duties and actions which are most expedient and least thought of. If Saul had not had a discreet servant he had returned but as wise as he came; now he is drawn in to consult with the man of God, and hears more than he hoped for. Saul was now a sufficient journey from his father's house; yet his religious servant, in this remoteness, takes knowledge of the place where the prophet dwells, and how honourably doth he mention him to his master.

Vers. 12, 13. This meeting was not more a sacrifice than it was a feast; these two agree well; we have never so much cause to rejoice in feasting as when we have duly served our God. The sacrifice was a feast to God, the other to men; the body may eat and drink with contentment when the soul hath been first fed. . . . The sacrifice was before consecrated when it was offered to God, but it was not consecrated to them till Samuel blessed it; his blessing made that meat holy to the guests which was formerly hallowed to God. . . . It is an unmannerly godlessness to take God's creatures without the leave of their Maker, and well may God withhold his blessing from them which have not the grace to ask it. . . . . Every Christian may sanctify his own meat; but where those are present that are peculiarly sanctified to God, this service is fittest for them.—*Bp. Hall*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15—27.

The Announcement to Saul of the Destiny that Awaited Him.

I. God has respect to the freedom of the human will. Although God had decided that Saul should be king of Israel, He would not do violence to his will, and oblige him to take the office against his inclination. All the dealings of Samuel with Saul on the occasion of this their first meeting were designed to impress him with the fact that great honour and responsibility were in store for him, and to lead him to acquiesce in the will of God concerning him. He was led gradually to accept as true the startling announcement with which Samuel greeted him, that upon him and upon his father's house was all the desire of Israel. Little by little the reality must have dawned upon him, and little by little, we may suppose, he was made willing to fall in with the Divine plan concerning him. We can well understand how far from his thoughts it was that, in seeking his father's asses, he should find a crown, and how inclined he would be to think that the prophet was mistaken when he intimated that some great promotion was in store for him. But when he found himself in the place of honour at the table of the chief magistrate of Israel, he must have begun to think that some great change awaited him, and it is probable that any lingering doubts were banished, and all his future made plain to him in the private communion which Samuel held with him on the following morning. In all these dealings with Saul we see how God has regard to the human will, which He has made free.

II. In the reception which Samuel gave to Saul we have an instance of true humility. Hitherto Samuel had been the first man in Israel; to him had belonged, and to him had been accorded the place of highest honour, and the choicest viands on the occasions of public assembly, but now he, although an aged man, not only willingly gives way to the young man who is in some things to take his place, but is the person who informs him of his call to the throne, and is the first to do him honour. No man could have acquitted himself with such grace and dignity under such circumstances, if he had not been possessed by the spirit of true humility.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 15, 27. The history of Saul's call brings before our eyes three points: (1) What an abundant blessing there is for obedience—the call to the service of God. (2) What a great danger lies hid in this blessing—idle self-exaltation because of this call. (3) To what a blessed stillness the danger leads when overcome—to preparation for the calling.—*Disselhoff.*

Ver. 17. What an intimate communion Samuel must have held with his God! A constant familiarity seems to have existed between them.—*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 22. How kindly doth Samuel entertain and invite Saul! Yet it was he only that should receive wrong by the future royalty of Saul. . . Wise and holy men, as they are not ambitious of their own burden, so they are not unwilling to be eased, when God pleaseth to discharge them; neither can they envy those whom God lifteth above their heads. They make an idol of honour that are troubled at their own freedom, or grudge at the promotion of others.—*Bp. Hall.*

The heads of the tribes accompanied Samuel to the altar, and then sat around his board. The chief of the government was godly in both alike, and he could hold the sweetest fellowship with those who were officially his

inferiors in the land. He lost not the respect of the people for his piety by his conduct at table, nor did the majesty of law provoke contempt by the familiarity of judge with people.—*Steel.*

Vers. 26, 27. Saul must wait patiently until God shall bring him out of concealment and make it manifest who he was. So should we also, if God has lent us gifts and wishes them to remain concealed with us, not be displeased at the fact that they are not recognised, but quietly wait until the Lord Himself, as it seemeth Him good, carries further the matter that He has begun.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

CHAPTER X.

Critical and Expository Notes.—Ver. 1. **"Then Samuel took a vial of oil," etc.** "The vial is a narrow-necked vessel, from which the oil flowed in drops. The oil, we must suppose, was not of the ordinary sort, but the holy anointing oil (Exod. xxix. 7; xxx. 23-33; xxvii. 29), which, according to the law, was used in the consecration of the sacred vessels and the priests. . . . . On account of the significance of the oil in priestly consecration, Samuel would have used no other in the consecration of the sacred person of the theocratic king. Anointing as a solemn usage in the consecration of a king is referred to as early as Judges ix. 8-15, and (besides Saul here) is expressly mentioned as performed on David, Absalom, Solomon, Joash, Jehoahaz, and Jehu. In case of regular succession the anointing was supposed to continue its effect, whence is explained the fact that only the above kings are mentioned as having been anointed. . . . The anointed was consecrated, sanctified to God; . . . it signifies, further, the equipment with the powers and gifts of the Spirit of God." *(Erdmann).* **"And kissed him."** "Subjects of rank were wont to kiss a new king in token of homage and subjection—just as among us the *hand* of a sovereign is kissed now. There was, no doubt, something of this in the kiss of Samuel; but, under the peculiar circumstances, there must have been something more. It was also the kiss of congratulation upon the dignity to which he had been raised; and while it indicated the dignified respect of Samuel to the man appointed to reign over the house of Israel, it also testified his cheerful acquiescence in the appointment." *(Kitto).*

Ver. 2. **"Rachel's sepulchre"** near Bethlehem (Gen. xxxv. 16). "After the allotment of the country to the several tribes, the territory of the Benjamites was extended by a long strip far into the south, to include the sepulchre of their beloved ancestress." *(Stanley).*

Ver. 3. **"The plain of Tabor,"** rather, the *oak*, or *terebinth* of Tabor. The site is unknown. **"Three men going up to Bethel."** Evidently to make an offering to God. "Bethel had been a consecrated place for the worship of God since the days of the patriarchs, in consequence of the revelations He had made to Abraham and Jacob (see Gen. xii. 8; xiii. 3, 4; xxviii. 18, etc.). In Bethel, therefore, there was an altar; it was one of the places where the people sacrificed to the Lord, and where Samuel at this time held court." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 4. **"And give the two loaves."** "That this surprising prelude to all future royal gifts is taken from bread of offering points to the fact, that in future some of the wealth of the land, which has hitherto gone undivided to the sanctuary, will go to the king." *(Ewald).* "An omen that God Himself would feed and sustain him, if he would only obey Him." *(Wordsworth).*

Ver. 5. **"Hill of God,"** rather, *Gibeah* of God, Saul's home. "Two things are clear; one, that Saul had got home when he got to Gibeah of God, for no further journeying is so much as hinted at, and the same word describes his home at ver. 26: the *other*, that there was a high place at Gibeah just above the city." *(Biblical Commentary).* **"A company of prophets."** "Here is the first mention of an influential institution which owes its origin to this period, viz., the schools of the prophets. . . . . Even if the schools of the prophets had begun to form themselves before the time of Samuel, which we have the less reason to doubt, since the book of Judges bears adequate testimony to the existence of prophets, and since it lay in the nature of the thing that individuals bound themselves together as closely as possible and joined in a common activity against the spirit of the time, yet we cannot suppose that there was any great extension and formal organisation of the institution previous to Samuel, from what is said in 1 Sam. iii. 1. Add to this the sporadic character of the activity of the prophets, which we learn from the Book of Judges. Finally, in favour of Samuel having virtually

established the schools of the prophets, we have the fact that we no longer meet with them except in the kingdom of Israel. This circumstance cannot be attributed to lack of information. The fact of our not meeting with them in the kingdom of Judah leads us to infer that they did not exist, and if this were the case, it is impossible to suppose that the schools of the prophets had taken deep root before Samuel. They appear as an institution established by him for a temporary object, and only continued, where necessity demanded it, in the kingdom of Israel, whose relations were, in many respects, similar to those in Samuel's time, where the prophethood occupied quite another position than in the kingdom of Judah, not being a mere supplement to the activity of the Levitical priesthood, but possessing the entire responsibility of maintaining the Kingdom of God in Israel. The principal passages referring to the schools of the prophets, besides this one, are 1 Kings xix. 20, 21; 2 Kings ii. 5, iv. 38, vi. 1. The designation is an awkward one, liable to cause misunderstanding. No instruction was given in the schools of the prophets, they were regular and organised societies. Taking all these passages together it becomes evident that they were in many respects a kind of monkish institution. Those who were educated there had a kind of common dwelling and a common table; the most distinguished of the prophets standing at its head as spiritual fathers. Music was employed as a principal means of edification, and of awakening prophetic inspiration. But what distinguishes the schools of the prophets from the cloisters, or at least from a great number of them, is their thorough practical tendency. They were hearths of spiritual life to Israel. Their aim was not to encourage a contemplative life, but to rouse the nation to activity; every prophetic disciple was a missionary." (*Hengstenberg*). "**With a psaltery,**" etc. The psaltery was a kind of lyre with ten or twelve strings, triangular in form. The *tabret*, or tabourine, or timbrel (Exod. xv. 21) was a species of hand drum. The *pipe* was a kind of flute, and the harp another stringed instrument resembling the psaltery. "**They shall prophesy.**" The emphasis rests on the words "and they were prophesying," they were in a condition of ecstatic inspiration in which, singing or speaking, with accompaniment of music, they gave expression to the overflowing feeling with which their hearts were filled from above by the controlling Spirit." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 6. "**The spirit of the Lord will come upon thee,**" lit., rush upon thee. "This phrase is used of those who, under the influence of Divine inspiration, uttered truths supernaturally revealed to them, in a lofty, poetic style, or who celebrated in exalted strains of praise the glorious deeds of Jehovah to His church. In this latter sense it is applied to Miriam (Exod. xv. 20, 21), to the seventy elders (Numb. xi. 29), and to the choir of young prophets, to which Saul joined himself, and in whose sacred employment he participated" (cf. Luke i. 65, end). (*Jamieson*). "**Shalt be turned into another man.**" "This expression is a remarkable one, and occurs nowhere else. Doubtless it describes the change in point of mental power and energy which would result from the influx of the Spirit of the Lord. In the case of Samson it was a supernatural bodily strength, in the case of Saul a capacity for ruling and leading the people, of which before he was destitute, which the Spirit wrought in him. The change in the mental power of the apostles, as described in Acts i, 8, is analogous. The change is described in verse 9, by saying that "God gave him another heart." The heart in the Hebrew acceptation points more to intellect and courage than to the affections and conscience." (*Biblical Commentary*). "Ecstatic states," says Tholuck, "have something infectious about them. The excitement spreads involuntarily, as in the American revivals and the preaching mania in Sweden, even to persons in whose state of mind there is no affinity to anything of the kind. But in the instance before us there was something more than psychical infection. The Spirit of Jehovah, which manifested itself in the prophesying of the prophets, was to pass over to Saul, so that he would prophesy along with them, and was entirely to transform him. This transformation is not, indeed, to be regarded as regeneration in the Christian sense, but as a change resembling regeneration, which affected the entire disposition of mind, and by which Saul was lifted out of his former modes of thought and feeling, which were confined within a narrow earthly sphere, into the far higher sphere of his new royal calling, was filled with kingly thoughts in relation to the service of God, and received *another heart.*" (*Kiel*).

Ver. 7. "**Do as occasion serve thee.**" "For God is with thee, and I will not intrude upon thee with imperious dictations on each several occasion, but I will leave thee to the free exercise of thy royal authority." (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 8. "**Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal,**" etc. "This, according to *Josephus*, was to be a standing rule for the observance of Saul while the prophet and he lived—that in every great crisis, as a hostile incursion into the country, he should repair to Gilgal, where he was to remain seven days, to afford time for the tribes on both sides of Jordan to assemble, and Samuel to reach it." (*Jamieson*). "Considering that at least two years elapsed between this time and that referred to in chap. xiii. 8-13; considering that Saul and Samuel had met at Gilgal, and offered peace-offerings to the Lord on one occasion between the times referred to in the two passages, it seems quite impossible that this verse can refer to the meeting spoken of in chap. xiii. 8-10." (*Biblical Commentary*).

Vers. 9 and 10. See on verse 6.

Ver. 11. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" "According to its origin, here given, this proverb does not merely express surprise at the sudden unexpected calling of a man to another calling in life, or to a high and honourable position. The personal and moral qualities of Saul, perhaps the religious-moral character of his family, or, at least, the mean opinion that was entertained of Saul's qualities and capacities, intellectually, religiously, and morally, formed the ground of surprise at his sudden assumption of the prophetic character." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 12. "Who is their father?" A somewhat obscure phrase. The Septuagint and some other versions read, '*Who is his father?*' *i.e.*, Who would have expected the son of Kish to be found among the prophets? Other readings, as the authorised version, understand *father* to refer to the head of the prophets, and the question to reflect blame upon him for admitting such a person as Saul into the company of the prophets. Wordsworth paraphrases, 'Who is the father of the prophets? Not man, but God. And God can make even Saul, whom ye despise, to be a prophet also.' Kiel—'Is *their* father a prophet, then?' *i.e.*, have they the prophetic spirit by virtue of their birth? 'The speaker declares,' says Bunsen, 'against the contemptuous remark about the son of Kish, that the prophets, too, owed their gift to no peculiarly lofty lineage. Saul also might, therefore, receive this gift as a gift from God, not as a patrimony."

Ver. 13. "When he had made an end of prophesying." "The gift, therefore, in his case, was transitory, not permanent, as in Samuel's: compare the case of Eldad and Medad, and the other elders, as contrasted with that of Moses" (Numb. xi. 25). *(Wordsworth).* **"The high place,"** whence the prophets had just descended. "Saul went *up* thither to pray and sacrifice in the holy place after his great experiences of the Divine favour and goodness, and so after his return home first to give God the glory before he returned to his family-life. He joined the *descending* company of the prophets in their solemn procession; but when his participation in the utterances of the prophetic inspiration were over, his look rested on the sacred height whence the men had descended, and the impulse of the spirit of the Lord forced him up thither, that, after the extraordinary offering he had made with the prophets, he might make the ordinary offering, and engage in worship." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 16. "Of the matter of the kingdom . . . . . he told him not." "This is to be referred, not to Saul's unassuming modesty, humility, or modesty (Keil and Ewald), or prudence (Themius), or apprehension of his uncle's incredulity and envy, but to the fact that Samuel, by his manner of imparting the divine revelation, had clearly and expressly given him to understand (ix. 25, 27) that it was meant in the first instance for him alone, and that it was not the Divine will that he should share it with others." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 17. "Mizpeh." See on chap. vii. 9. **"Unto the Lord."** "Implying the presence of the ark, or the tabernacle, or the High Priest's ephod." Comp. ver. 19." *(Biblical Commentary).*

Ver. 20 "The family of Matri . . . . and Saul the son of Kish was taken." "When the heads of the households in this family came, and *after* the different individuals in the households were taken, the lot fell upon *Saul the son of Kish.* The historian proceeds at once to the final result of the casting of the lots, without describing the intermediate steps any further. . . . . As the result of the lot was regarded as a divine decision, not only was Saul to be accredited by this act as the king appointed by the Lord, but he himself was also to be the more fully assured of his own election on the part of God." *(Keil).* "*How* the lots were cast is not said; commonly it was by throwing tablets (Josh. xviii. 6, 8, etc.), but sometimes by drawing from a vessel." (Numb. xxxiii. 54). The latter seems to have been the method here employed." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 22. "They inquired of the Lord . . . . and the Lord answered." "The inquiry was made through the high priest, by means of the Urim and Thummim. There can be no doubt that in a gathering of the people for so important a purpose, the high priest would also be present, even though this is not expressly stated." *(Keil).* "The high-priest's office was vacant, some other, not Samuel, who presided over the assembly and the election, but a priest, in the high priestly robes, conducted the solemn inquiry, which was exclusively the privilege of the priests." *(Erdmann).* **"If the man should yet come hither;"** rather, *has any one else come hither? i.e.*, besides those here present among whom Saul was not to be found." *(Erdmann).* **"Among the stuff."** "Rather, the *baggage.* The assembly was like a camp, and the baggage of the whole congregation was probably collected in one place, where the waggons were arranged for protection." *(Biblical Commentary).* "The ground was his diffidence and shyness in respect to appearing publicly before the whole people. *Nagelsbach* rightly remarks that his hiding behind the baggage during the election is not in conflict with the account of his change of mind. At so decisive a moment, which turns the eyes of all on *one* with the most diverse feelings, the heart of the most courageous man may well beat." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 23. "He was higher than any of the people," etc. **"When in battle much less depended on military skill than upon the bodily prowess of the chief in single combats, or in**

the partial actions with which most battles commenced, it was natural that the people should take pride in the gigantic proportions of their leader, as calculated to strike terror into the enemy, and confidence into his followers; besides, it was no mean advantage that the crest of the leader should, from his tallness, be seen from afar by his people. The prevalence of this feeling of regard for personal bulk and stature is seen in the sculptures of ancient Egypt, Assyria, and Persia, and even in the modern paintings of the last-named nation, in which the sovereign is invested with gigantic proportions in comparison with the persons around him." (*Kitto*).

Ver. 24. "**God save the king.**" Rather, *let the king live.* The Hebrew is equivalent to the French *Vive le Roi.*

Ver. 25. "**Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom.**" On the first establishment of the kingdom it was possible to make conditions and to impose restrictions, to which any future king, royal by birth, and on whom the crown devolved by hereditary right, would not very willingly submit. There can be no doubt that the people, under the infatuation which now possessed them, would have put themselves under the monarchy without any conditions whatever, and it is entirely owing to the wise forethought of Samuel, acting under the Divine direction, that this evil was averted, and the kings of Israel did not become absolute and irresponsible masters of the lives and properties of their subjects." (*Kitto*). "This *law* of the kingdom is not identical with the *manner* of the king described by Samuel in chap. viii. 11-18. The Hebrew word rendered manner in both places is *mishpat*, which properly means *judgment, right, law*, that which is strictly *de jure;* but it also signifies *usage, manner, custom*, that which is *de facto*, and the *mishpat* of the *kingdom* here expresses the former, but the *mishpat* of the *king* in chap. viii. comprehends also the latter." (*Wordsworth*). "In content it was no doubt essentially the same with the law of the king in Deut. xvii. 14-20, especially verses 19, 20, and therefore related to the divinely-established rights and duties of the theocratic king, the fulfilment of which the people were authorised to demand from him." (*Erdmann*). "**Wrote it in a book.**" "We find here the first trace, after the written records of Moses, of writing among the prophets, long before the literary activity to which we owe what we have now." (*Erdmann*). "**Laid it up before the Lord.**" "It was, no doubt, placed in the tabernacle, where the law of Moses was also deposited." (*Keil*).

Ver. 26. "**A band of men,**" etc.; rather, *the host;* but "here it does not signify a large military force, but a crowd of brave men whose hearts God had touched to give him a royal escort, and show their readiness to serve him." (*Keil*).

Ver. 27. "**Children of Belial**" (see on chap. ii. 12). "**Presents,**" *Minchah.* "The token of homage and acknowledgment from the subject to the sovereign, and from the tributary nation to their suzerain" (see 2 Sam. viii. 2, 6; Judges iii. 17, 18; 1 Kings iv. 21, etc.). (*Biblical Commentary*). "**But he held his peace.**" Literally, "He *was as being deaf*," *i.e.*, he acted as if he had not heard.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—Verses 1-10.

THE PRIVATE CONSECRATION OF SAUL, AND THE MIRACULOUS ATTESTATION TO HIS CALL.

I. The most eventful forces of human life often begin in secret. The great forces in nature begin in secret. The mightiest cedar of Lebanon put forth its first tiny germ beneath the earth, and while men slept showed itself above ground, and received its first anointing of the dew when no human eye was there to look on. And the great men who have become mighty forces in the world have had their characters moulded and the direction of their lives determined by incidents unnoticed by the world. They became kings among their fellows, but their anointing took place in secret. They began their career buried in obscurity, and their first coming to the light was a circumstance unnoticed by any. It was not till God publicly called them to His service by the voice of His providence that men recognised who and what they were. So the anointing of the first king of Israel was witnessed by no one except those engaged in the transaction. The consecration of this man, whose name has ever since had a place in human history, was performed in the most private manner. The first act in the establishment

of this kingdom, like that of many others, came not with observation. Our Lord teaches that this is an especial characteristic of the gospel kingdom, both in the world and in the heart. He, as king, made His first appearance upon the earth in a stable in the presence of one or two humble peasants, and received His first adoration from shepherds as He lay in a manger. "*The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which, indeed, is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs*" (Matt. xiii. 31, 32). And the beginning of Christ's kingdom in the individual heart is marked by the same characteristic. The anointing of the Spirit which seals a human soul to God takes place unobserved by others—the ordination to be a king unto God (Rev. i. 6) is a private transaction between the soul and Him who has called it out of darkness to light—it is like the hiding of the leaven—an unnoticed act—only known to others by its effects (Matt. xiii. 33). Ananias the disciple at Damascus was the only human being who was made cognisant of the fact that Saul of Tarsus had uttered his first prayer to Jesus of Nazareth; but what an eventful force was then set in motion—how mighty have been the influences which have ever since been flowing from that act of consecration to God—from the anointing of that mighty king in the Church of Christ.

II. Epochs in the history of the Church, and in the history of individual souls, are generally preceded and followed by signs. The exodus of Israel from Egypt was preceded by supernatural events, and signs and wonders followed that epoch in their history. The manifestation of God in the burning bush, and the miracles done in Egypt, ushered in their national birth, which was followed by the Divine manifestation in the pillar of cloud and by the giving of bread from heaven, water from the rock, etc. At the epoch in the world's history created by the bringing into the world the first-begotten Son of God (Heb. i. 6), there were signs preceding and following in gifts of the Holy Ghost and angelic visits to lowly men and women (Luke i. 11, 20, 24, 28, 41, 67; ii. 9, 27, 38), and before his entrance on His public ministry, which was marked by miracles from beginning to end, there was the supernatural manifestations connected with His baptism. The entrance of the apostles upon their great work was an epoch in the history of the world and of the Church, and signs preceded it on the day of Pentecost and followed it in the conversion of three thousand souls, as well as in the miracles of healing, and of resurrection, and of judgment connected with their ministry and with that of others associated with them (Acts iii. 7; v. 1–11; v. 8; viii. 13; ix. 40; xiii. 11; xv. 3; xix. 11, etc.). "*The word which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will*" (Heb. ii. 4). The anointing of Saul marked a great epoch in the history of the Hebrew nation, and it was in accordance with the general rule of God's government that it should be preceded and followed by signs, some of a more private nature, and others, especially that of Saul's endowment with the spirit of prophecy, of a public character. And the same truth holds good as to epochs in the individual soul. When that soul enters into entirely new conditions by entering into new relations to God, signs follow and precede the entrance. Like those before mentioned, some are known only to the man himself, but some are evident to onlookers. Pricking of conscience—an awakening to the sense of the burden of unpardoned sin, is a sign from heaven. This sign evidently preceded and accompanied the conversion of the great Apostle of the Gentiles (Acts ix. 5, 11), and it is found in a greater or less degree whenever a soul is turned "from the power of Satan unto God." But more public signs follow in the new life of those who believe—signs which are not only

for the confirmation of their own faith, but for evidence to those who believe not. In connection with the new life to which Saul was now called, the signs which went before and followed his consecration not only confirmed his own faith in the really Divine nature of his call, but some of them were so evident to others also as to make them conscious that a great change had passed over him. In many respects he was another man. And the new life which follows the new birth is the most convincing testimony to the truth that there is a Spirit of God working in the world. "The words of Christ," says Neander, "assure us that the communication of the life of God to men was the greatest of all miracles, the essence and aim of all; and further, that it was to be the standing miracle of all after ages."

III. Signs accompanying a message from God are intended to lead to a practical result. They are to confirm faith and to lead to the exercise of the gifts entrusted. "And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou shalt do as occasion serve thee" (ver. 7). This was the intention of the sign given to Moses in the burning bush. He was to go to Pharaoh in the certainty that God was with him, and he was to demand the deliverance of his people, and become their leader and lawgiver. The signs here vouchsafed to Saul were to lead him to the exercise of his newly-acquired gifts—they were an encouragement and a call to him to use the powers which God now implanted within him. So the signs given to the apostles on the day of Pentecost were not simply events to be marvelled at, but the newly-gotten gifts which they signified were to be used for the joy of the receivers, the glory of the Giver, and the blessing of others. The remarkable signs which accompanied the conversion of the New Testament Saul were a call to him to "*bear the name*" of Him who had appeared to him "*before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel*," even when the bearing of it involved the suffering of "*great things*" for the sake of his Lord (Acts ix. 15, 16). And so it is with every man who is called out of darkness into marvellous light—by life and word he is expected to show forth the praises of Him who has called him (1 Pet. ii. 9).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. The natural basis for this symbolism of oil is its power to dispense *light* and *life, joy* and *healing*, by which it sets forth the Spirit's dispensation of *light* and *life* and the therein contained gifts and powers. And in the historical development of the theocracy and of the Divine revelations which point to the perfecting and fulfilment of the theocracy in the new covenant, the symbolic anointing of theocratic *kings, priests*, and *prophets*, as sign of the impartation of the spirit of God and its powers, is the type, that is, the historical foretokening and prefiguring of the anointing of the Spirit without measure (John iii. 34), and with the Spirit of might (Acts x. 38) by which Jesus was "the Christ," the anointed of God for the New Testamental kingdom of God, first as King of His kingdom, and then as chief Prophet and Priest. Samuel's word, "*The Lord* hath anointed thee," signifies that God Himself, of His free grace, dispenses the powers and gifts of His Spirit, when He calls to an office in His kingdom and service.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 1–9. *How the Lord fits His chosen ones for the kingly calling in His kingdom.* 1. By *quiet instruction* by means of His word He brings them into a right knowledge of the tasks He assigns. 2. By *the anointing of His Spirit* He imparts to them the needful power and strength therefore. 3. By the *production of infallible signs* He gives them a just certainty and joyous confidence. *The signs of Divine guidance along the paths of human life on earth*, how they—1. *Pointing back-*

wards, remind us of grace in past times (the holy places); 2. *Pointing upwards*, admonish us to lift up the heart from worthless, earthly things to higher good; 3. *Pointing forwards*, demand a new life in the Spirit; and 4. Call on us to *look into our own heart*, while for the work of renewal of the whole man they promise the gifts and powers of the Spirit from above. *The* appearance of special Divine signs in human life—1. *Whence coming? Ordered* in time by God's wise Providence, not springing from chance, not *aimless*; *decreed* in His eternal purpose, not accidental, not *groundless*; *sent* as messengers of His holy and gracious will, not *meaningless*. 2. *To whom applying?* To him who lets himself be *guided* by God; to him who *holds still* when God is guiding him, and to him who lets God *speak to him* by His word. 3. *What signifying? Reminding* of the saving and gracious presence of God (partly in the past, partly in the present: God is with thee). Pointing to our tasks, which under the guidance of the Lord are to be fulfilled (vers. 7, 8). *Exhorting* to a renewal of the whole inner life through the power of the Holy Ghost (vers. 6–9).—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 6. **The Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee.** 1. *A great word of promise*, which applies to *everyone* that is called to the kingdom of God. 2. *A wonderful event* of the inner life which occurs and is experienced only under definite conditions. 3. *The beginning of a new life* which takes place by the change of the heart.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 7. **The great word, "God is with thee."** 1. The *infallible signs*, which assure us of it. 2. The *consoling strength* which the heart thereby receives. 3. The *mighty impulse* to do according to God's good pleasure, which lies therein. 4. The *earnest exhortation* which is thereby given in all the occurrences of human life to mark the will of the Lord therein made known.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Vers. 6-8. **What the royal anointing gives, and what it demands.** 1. It makes the anointed one fit for all that his office may lay upon him. 2. It demands that the anointed one should now do nothing more according to his own choice, but everything according to the direction and will of God.—*Disselhoff.*

Ver. 9. He has no longer the heart of a husbandman, concerned only about his corn and cattle, but the heart of a statesman, a general, and a prince, whom God calls to any service He will make fit for it.—*Henry.*

Saul had *another* heart, but he had not a *new* heart. He gave evidence of possessing the gifts of kingship, but none of the grace of holy living. While he could henceforth command armies and practise diplomacy, he cared not for keeping a conscience void of offence toward God and man. . . . . It is not enough to have natural endowments, or learned attainments of skill or wisdom. These may be possessed in the highest degree, while the soul is unrenewed and unreconciled to God.—*Steel.*

Before Saul's election he occupied a very low standpoint, intellectually and spiritually. He scarcely knew anything of Samuel, the centre of all higher Israelitish life. Nothing moves him to make acquaintance with the celebrated prophet but anxiety respecting the lost asses. . . . . But we see that there was a decisive change in Saul's life—that in the parable of the sower he belonged not to the first class, but to the third.—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 10. Saul, by conversing with prophets, prophesied: see the power and profit of holy company. Those that live within the sunshine of religion cannot but be somewhat coloured of their beams.—*Trapp.*

The Spirit bloweth where it listeth (John iii. 8), and the power of the Holy Ghost manifested itself by sudden effusions before the day of Pentecost; but on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven by Christ

to His church, to abide with her *for ever* (John xiv. 16).—*Wordsworth.*

As of Saul it is written when the Spirit came upon him, "he was changed into a new man;" this holds true even of the whole world. For when the breath of the Holy Ghost came upon it, it was cast into a new mould presently, and became a new world.—*Bishop Andrewes.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11-12 *and* 27.

SAUL AMONG THE PROPHETS.

I. God often accomplishes his purposes by agencies both unlooked for and despised. That a Hebrew slave should be taken from a dungeon and made lord of Egypt was no doubt an event as undesired as it was unexpected by the nobles of Pharaoh's court, and that this despised younger brother should be the instrument of saving all his house from starvation was as equally far from the desire and expectation of Jacob's elder sons. That another Hebrew youth should be educated and fitted in Pharaoh's court to become the axe which should be laid at the root of the tyranny of Egypt, was another event which men little expected to come to pass, and which crossed the wishes and desires of many. And it as little accorded with the expectation and wish of the majority of the Israelites who knew Saul the son of Kish that he should be found first among the prophets and then upon the throne. Those who had known the young man from his youth never expected to see him in any other position than that in which he had grown to manhood, and a larger number were as surprised as they were disappointed when they found that a member of the smallest tribe of Israel, and one who had given no proof of his power to rule, was to be elevated to the throne of the nation. But this has been the general method of the Divine working in the world. Not only in the establishment of the Gospel kingdom but in the accomplishment of most of His purposes, which are indeed all subservient to that one great Divine purpose—"*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence*" (1 Cor. i. 27–29). Men look in the high places of the earth for those who are to do the great things of the world, but God puts His hand upon some obscure and despised and unlikely instrument and uses him for the work that "*they may see, and know, and consider, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it*" (Isa. xli. 20).

II. The way in which men ought to regard this method of the Divine working. There are many men among the teachers of the Church of God who have been raised from a much more lowly position. Yet when another from a similar position reveals that God has bestowed gifts and graces upon him also, those who can boast no higher origin exclaim with astonishment and scorn, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" It behoves all who ask such a question to consider the origin of all intellectual and spiritual endowments—to remember that they are all bestowed by the common Father, who is not accountable to them for the distribution of them. But the spirit which would exclude some from a participation in them manifested itself very early in the Church of God. When "the Lord took of *the Spirit that was upon Moses, and gave it unto the seventy elders:*" and "*they prophesied and did not cease,*" and "*Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, there ran a young man and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord, Moses,*

forbid them" (Numb. xi. 25–28). But Moses remembered and acknowledged *"who hath made man's mouth, and who maketh the dumb, or the seeing, or the blind"* (Exod. iv. 11)—he knew whose was the Spirit which had rested so abundantly upon him, and that all the servants of God had one common Father, and he therefore answered, *"Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them"* (Numb. xi. 29). This is the attitude which becomes all God's servants to take when they behold a Saul among the prophets—it behoves them all to ask the question asked by one in the days of Saul, *"But who is their father?"* It was as great a surprise to the disciples at Jerusalem to hear of the New Testament Saul among the preachers as it was for the inhabitants of Gibeah to see the Old Testament Saul among the prophets. But the surprise in both cases arose from forgetfulness of the truth contained in the heart-searching question afterwards put by that great apostle to the Corinthian church—*"For who maketh thee to differ from one another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"* (1 Cor. iv. 7).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 11, 12. Let not the worst be despaired of, yet let not an external show of devotion, and a sudden change for the present, be too much relied on; for Saul among the prophets was Saul still.—*Henry.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—20.

Saul's Public Recognition.

I.—It is a mark of the greatest folly and ingratitude to forsake old and tried friends for those who are new and untried. This was what Israel was now doing. They were setting aside an old and faithful human friend in the person of Samuel for the young man of whom they knew nothing except that he was endowed with a fine physical frame. But they were guilty of far greater sin and folly. Although God had elected their king, yet we have seen (see on chap. viii. 6-22) He had only done so because He would not compel them to acquiesce in His plans for their welfare; and in insisting upon having "a king like the nations," they had forsaken him who "Himself had saved them out of all their adversities and tribulation," who had "delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed them" (vers. 18, 19). God had indeed been a friend whose faithfulness had been tried and found unfailing, and in desiring a human king Israel gave proof of how ungrateful men can be, and how an apparent advantage and a wrong desire indulged in can blind men to their own interest.

II. Those who are thus foolish and ungrateful often find that those whom they have rejected are still indispensable to their welfare. Israel had still to look to Samuel to guard them against some of the evil fruits which would spring from their own self-will. To him they owed the preservation of some national liberty—he alone it was who was able to tell them the "manner of the kingdom," and who "wrote it in a book" and laid it up for the use of future generations. And they had to look to the King whom they had forsaken to preserve the life and to give success to the king whom they had chosen in His place. It is vain for men to try and free themselves from obligations even to good *men*—they must either directly or indirectly be indebted to them. But

it is far more useless and foolish for men to try and do without God, while every good gift which they enjoy comes from Him in whom they "live and move and have their being." On the first day when Israel set out to do without God, they are found appealing to Him for guidance and help.

III. Those prove themselves to be true friends who are willing still to help those who have thus rejected them. That God was still careful for the interests of the children whom He had "*nourished and brought up*," but who "*had rebelled against Him*" (Isa. i. 2)—that He was still kind to these "*unthankful and evil*" (Luke vi. 35) Israelites—shows how infinitely good and gracious He is, and how unfailing is His friendship, and that Samuel should have borne himself as he did under the circumstances shows that he was a true and real patriot and friend.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 22. I cannot blame Saul for hiding himself from a kingdom, especially of Israel. Honour is heavy when it comes on the best terms; how should it be otherwise, when all men's cares are cast on one; but most of all in a troubled estate? No man can put to sea without danger, but he that launcheth forth in a tempest expecteth the hardest event. Such was the condition of Israel. . . . . Well did Saul know the difference between a peaceful government and the perilous and wearisome tumults of war. The quietest throne is full of cares, the perplexed of dangers. Cares and dangers drove Saul into this corner, to hide his head from a crown: these made him choose rather to lie obscurely among the baggage of his tent than to sit gloriously in the throne of state.—*Bp. Hall.*

Whether this act of Saul arose from a culpable distrust of God, or an excessive diffidence in himself, we cannot determine, but it forms a singular contrast with the spirit that marks his after life; his eager and extreme jealousy of a rival, both in his power and popularity. This should convince us how little we know of ourselves till placed in circumstances that may call forth our peculiar tempers or passions; for often we are as different persons at different periods of our lives, as Saul at this juncture from Saul after the lapse of some years, when with ungovernable violence he sought the life of David, dreading him as a competitor for the throne.—*Lindsay.*

Ver. 25. In the Word of God there is a clear definition of the rights of the ruled as well as of the rights of the ruler. No man is at liberty to tyrannize over another. . . . . It is a solemn thought that all our engagements are laid up before the Lord. They are held in all their integrity by him, and he never fails to fulfil his part.—*Steel.*

Ver. 26. This verbal declaration of God was not enough. There must also be an actual one. God's election is not vain and feeble; if it be real, it must prove itself in the gifts and deeds of him who is chosen. The people felt this, even those who acknowledged the election with all their heart. Saul himself also felt it. Both waited for the future actual ratification (chap. xi.). Until then everything remained as it had been.—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 27. If Saul had attached an overweening importance to himself we should have seen a very different course of conduct. But it was the absence of this which saved him. The utterances of the men of Belial proceeded on the presumption that at the moment self-importance was the prominent principle at work in Saul's heart; it was a shaft aimed at this, as they imagined that it would not only

be there, but uppermost. Mistaken, however, as to the mark, they failed in hitting and wounding. . . . Many are the blessings attendant on humility, and among them this is not the least, that it denies opportunity to those who would seek to wound us through pride.—*Miller.*

Notwithstanding that they (1) questioned his capacity, (2) despised his power, (3) refused him homage and help, he was as though he were deaf, thereby showing (1) self-control, (2) prudence, (3) humility. Apply this to (1) public officers, (2) employers of servants and other subordinates, (3) persons in society, (4) church officials. There is a high sense in which God acts thus, and bad men imagine that He is really deaf. (Psalm lxxiii.; xciv. 7; Job xxii. 13).—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 26. Saul was to have one other proof that without hesitation he might in all the future of his life seek and find his all in God. What is a man without friends, especially if he have great responsibilities pressing around him, and great cares devolving on him? And who are our best friends? Not those who talk about us the most—not those who trumpet our praises and advertise our talents; but those who think of us in our homes, and who come, knowing we are careworn, to ask if they can help us, and who stand ready to do us a service which only God's eye can see, a kindness the knowledge of which is confined to our house, and to the chambers of the heart made glad by this persional attention. If ever man wanted such attentions it must have been Saul, when he found himself all at once king over Israel. . . . The election is over, the excitement is past, its bustle subsided. He must go home as well as the rest of the people; but, ah! in how different a state of mind from theirs. Men can often bear up in public under circumstances beneath which they break down immediately when alone. . . . Real friends know this, and hence they will not say, because they see a man keep up in public, "Ah, he is quite equal to his duties; he will do very well now, we may leave him," but rather they will, because he has kept up before others, expect it is all the more probable that he will not do so in private, and they will think of him at home, and they will follow him thither with their prayers at least; but if the opportunity serves, with their presence too. They will show that they have *hearts*—hearts in the worthiest sense of the term—and that their hearts have been indeed *touched.* All this comes before us in the history. Saul is not allowed to go home alone. No; he must be sustained by sympathy and friendship; he shall not feel solitary, he shall not go unattended. But mark that word—*God.* Even these emotions of sympathy—these proofs of attachment—these manifestations of heart—are not, by the historian, allowed to pass before us as just the natural working of men's own minds under the peculiar circumstances of the case. *God* was in them. *God* excited them, and in the fact that *God* touched their hearts and disposed them favourably, Saul was to gain a new encouragement, a new assurance of being in the path of duty. This power, too, which God possesses of touching the hearts of men, is one which it were well if we more distinctly recognised and completely confided in. . . . . It is much better, easier, safer, more dignified to get at men's hearts *through God's power over them,* than to seek their good opinion by any lower effort.—*Miller.*

CHAPTER XI

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"Nahash."** He was king of the children of Ammon, as appears from chap. xii. 12; 2 Sam. x. 1, 2, xvii. 27. He seems to have been connected with the family of David, since Abigail, David's sister, was the daughter (perhaps meaning *grand-daughter*), of Nahash (2 Sam. xvii. 25; 1 Chron. ii. 16, 17), and perhaps, in consequence of this connection, was very friendly to David. Even after the destructive war with his son Harun, in which Uriah fell, and when David was in flight and banishment, we find another son of Nahash, Shobi, showing him marked kindness. (*Biblical Dictionary.*) "According to chap. xii. 12, the threatening war with the Ammonites was the immediate occasion of the demand for a king. Naturally therefore, Nahash, having before made his preparations, entered the Israelitish territory soon after the king was chosen and confirmed." *(Erdmann.)* **"Jabesh-Gilead."** According to *Josephus*, this city was the capital of Gilead, and was probably on the site of the present ruins of El-Deir, on the south side of the Wady Jabis, not far to the north of Helaweh, near the ancient road that leads to Beisan. The Ammonites had long claimed the right to the possession of Gilead, and had been subdued by Jephthah.

Ver. 2. **"On this condition," etc.** "The left eye would be covered with the shield in battle: the right eye was needed for aiming the spear; they would therefore be no better than blind if they lost their right eye." *(Wordsworth.)* **"Lay it for a reproach," etc** "He sought to avenge upon the people of Israel the shame of the defeat which Jephthah had inflicted on the Ammonites." *(Kiel.)*

Ver. 3. **"If there is no one who saves us."** "The assumption of this as possible, and the fact that they sent to *every region* of Israel, shows that in this transition-period from the Judges to the King-dom, in spite of what Samuel had done to inspire unity of action, the old division of powers in tribal isolation and the consequent weakness against enemies still continued.(*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 4. **"Told the tidings in the ears of the people."** Either they were not aware of the election of Saul, as Keil supposes, or they did not approve of his appointment, or he was not in Gibeah and did not return from his ordinary occupation until the message had been delivered.

Ver. 5. **"What aileth the people?"** Even the men of Gibeah did not apply to Saul, which seems to show that he was not held in much esteem in his native city.

Ver. 6. **"And the Spirit of God."** This time the Spirit of God came upon him, as upon the Judges before him, as a Spirit of supernatural energy and power—compare Judges iii. 10, v. 34, xi. 29, etc.—*(Biblical Dictionary).*

Ver. 7. **"And he took a yoke of oxen," etc.** "This was a symbolical action, which struck the mind more than words could have done" *(Clericus)*, and "was suited to the character and habits of an agricultural and pastoral people." *(Jamieson.)* **"After Samuel."** "The introduction of Samuel's name is a proof that Saul, even as king, still recognised the authority which Samuel possessed in Israel as prophet of Jehovah." *(Kiel.)* **"And the fear of the Lord fell," etc.** "Jehovah is not equivalent to Elohim, nor is the fear of Jehovah in the sense of fear of His punishment, but a fear inspired by Jehovah." *(Kiel.)* "The Spirit of the Lord, which impelled Saul to this noble and vigorous action, so strangely contrasted with his former quiet life behind the plough, laid hold at the same time on the whole nation, so that it was suddenly lifted up, as it were involuntarily, in the uniting and strengthening power of this Spirit from above, to a new life before God (in His fear) and within itself (in unity and union) against the enemies of the theocracy." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 8. **"Bezek."** "In the tribe of Issachar, in the plain of Jezreel, not far from Bethshean, at about as great an elevation as Jabesh, according to Eusebius (Onomasticon) seventeen Roman miles north of Nablous, on the road to Scythopolis." (*Erdmann.*) **"The children of Israel," etc.** "This separate mention of Israel and Judah smacks of the times that followed the division of the Israelites into two kingdoms." (*Clericus.*) "The numbers will not appear too large if we bear in mind that the allusion is not to a regular army, but that Saul had summoned all the people to a general levy." (*Keil.*) "That the large and powerful tribe of Judah has the relatively small number (30,000) of warriors over against the 300,000 of Israel, is due to the fact that a large part of its territory was in the possession of the Philistines, as to whose further advance more care had to be taken, now that the north-eastern frontier of the country was threatened by the Ammonites." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 11. **"On the morrow," etc.** "Crossing the Jordan—probably by the upper ford opposite Wady Jabis, which comes down from the east into the Jordan opposite Beisan—in the evening, Saul marched his army, all night according to *Josephus*, thirty furlongs." (*Jamieson.*) **"Into the midst of the host."** "Of the Ammonites who had gone forth to meet the sally of the men of Jabesh, and found themselves between them and Saul's companies." *(Wordsworth.)*

"They which remained were scattered." *Josephus* adds that they made a great slaughter—Nahash being amongst the number of the slain—and pursued the fugitives in a complete rout across the desert." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 12. **"And the people said unto Samuel."** "To whom they still looked as their ruler, and whose presence is mentioned to show Saul's moderation and clemency at this time; for it was not Samuel but Saul who interfered to rescue those who had despised him." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 13. **"And Saul said."** "An evidence that Saul was beginning to gain confidence under the influence of the Spirit of God." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 14. **"Gilgal."** Doubtless the Gilgal mentioned in chapter x. 1. Most commentators think it was the one in the Jordan valley. See notes on chapter vii. 16. "A very appropriate place, formerly the camp of Joshua (Josh. v. 9 and vi. 10), and connected with those glorious victories which God had wrought by his hand when He first settled Israel in Canaan." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 15. **"And there they made Saul king before the Lord."** "These words mean nothing more than the solemn announcement and presentation of Saul before the nation as divinely appointed king in consequence of the divine legitimation given by his brilliant exploit against the Ammonites. The 'before the Lord' indicates the essential difference between this act, and the proclamation and homage at Mizpah, marking the *religious act of installation* sealed with a solemn offering, by which Saul was formerly and solemnly consecrated to his office by the invisible God-king." (*Erdmann.*) "The late period at which the regal form of government was established in Israel is an evidence of the Divine origin of the law, which in a certain degree provides for it, and restrains it. It was not unproductive of advantage to the permanent interests of religion that this great change was delayed by Providence until the Mosaic law had subsisted long enough to prove that its first establishment had not originated in any human policy, and that its subsequent support was independent of any human power." (*Graves.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-3.

THE AMMONITE INVASION OF JABESH-GILEAD.

I. Times of weakness are times of undesired visitation. When a man is commercially weak, and when he has least desire to see the face of those who will add to his embarrassments, then is the time when they are most certain to visit him. A visit from his creditors would not affright him if he had wherewith to meet their demands, but the very fact that his resources are inadequate makes them more likely to visit him. Especially if he has a creditor who is unkindly disposed towards him, that creditor's visit will be most undesired; but a visit from him may be most certainly looked for. So there are times when the soul is depressed—when many things seem to combine to make a man morally weak, and that is the time when he may most certainly expect a visit from his great spiritual adversary. The tempter, by bringing up all his forces to assault the soul at such a time, reveals his watchful subtlety and his power to measure the resources of the human soul. In times of mental weakness from weakness of body, or from especially harassing circumstances, we feel least of all to desire to have to do battle with a strong temptation; yet then is the time when it is almost certain to assault us. The devil came to Christ when He was physically weak from forty days' fasting, and when, without doubt, His human soul was depressed in consequence (Matt. iv. 2). And again, when He hung upon the cross in great pain of body and sorrow of soul, he tempted Him through his emissaries with the taunt, "*He saved others, Himself He cannot save; if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross*" (Mark xv. 30). The geographical position of Jabesh-Gilead made its inhabitants at all times less able to defend themselves from the common national enemies than the people on the other side of Jordan. Being so far from the centre of government, they were at all times peculiarly exposed to danger. They do not appear at this time to have taken part in the national movement towards unity which

had drawn together and strengthened the great mass of the Israelitish nation, and they were consequently much less able to defend themselves than most of their fellow-countrymen. As a natural consequence, their enemies chose this time to invade them and to insult them. At a time when, by reason of their tribal isolation as well as their defenceless geographical position, they had most to dread from a visit of the Ammonites, at this time the visit was made.

II. Times of weakness subject men to the insolence of their enemies. A consciousness that we are strong, either physically or in our circumstances, has a wonderful tendency to make men treat us civilly. A consciousness that we are spiritually strong will tend to make our spiritual and invisible enemies less daring in their assaults. A pugilist, in the presence of one who is his equal in strength and stature, restrains his natural insolence. If he meets a man who is bigger and stronger than himself, he becomes quite deferential. But bring him face to face with a man of half his own size and strength, and he will probably insult him. And so it is with the strength and weakness of social position. The wise man says that "the rich man's wealth is his strong city" (Prov. x. 15), and in this he often shelters himself as in a fortress, and shoots forth arrows of scornful contempt and insolence upon those who are socially dependent upon him, and who are consequently too weak to retaliate. And what is true in relation to individuals is true also of nations. The strong nations of the earth are, alas! often found insolently regardless of the rights of those who are too weak to defend their own liberties. Nahash would not have confronted the men of Jabesh-Gilead with so insolent an air, and proposed to them terms so humiliating, if they had not been in his eyes in so defenceless a condition.

III. Times of visitation from insolent enemies should drive us to the strong for help. It was wise of the men of Gilead not to attempt to meet their enemies in their own strength. It is most unwise of men to be too proud to acknowledge their own weakness. While it is unmanly to be always depending upon others for help—while a man is bound to exert himself to the utmost to free himself from difficulties—a refusal to seek help from a stronger fellow-creature is sometimes sinful. God has ordained that the strength of some should supplement the weakness of others, and the inequality of men in this respect is intended to bind them to each other. When, therefore, a man in distress from which he cannot extricate himself, chooses ruin rather than the aid of a stronger arm than his own, he refuses to fall in with a Divine ordination. And this truth can be extended to the help which can come only from an arm which is stronger than the arm of flesh. Times of especial trial and temptation should make men feel their dependence upon Omnipotent strength, and if they do not drive them to seek help from the strong God, they fail to fulfil the design of Him who either sent them for that purpose, or permitted them to happen that He might be glorified in delivering those who call upon Him in distress.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verse 2. In spiritual things this is precisely what is done by the Bishop of Rome. He is a "Nahash the Ammonite" in the Catholic Church of Christ. He requires of all Christians to make a surrender of their reason, conscience, and their will (which belong to their Master, Christ) as the price of communion with himself. If we are willing to allow him to "thrust out our right eyes," then he will allow us to communicate with himself, but not otherwise.—*Wordsworth.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4—15.

Saul's First Victory.

I. Men need an occasion to reveal their qualifications for special and important service. Much power lies hidden in the world, because it has never met with an occasion to call it out—because it has never been brought into contact with the combination of circumstances needed to make it manifest. The power by which men send their thoughts round the world by the telegraph wire, or make their words audible at a distance by means of the telephone, has been in the world ever since its creation, but it has only been made manifest in modern times, because men have only lately learned how to give it an occasion to reveal its mighty and wonderful capabilities. If one saw an acorn or a corn-seed for the first time, and was ignorant of the process of germination, he would not dream of the wondrous capabilities which lay hidden within them. And if they were always kept above the ground or planted in an unsuitable soil, or if the rain and sun never reached them, the hidden power within them would remain hidden for ever. And so it is with the mental and spiritual capabilities of men. They may be there, but they need an occasion to call them forth. A soldier may be possessed of courage enough to head a forlorn hope, or of endurance enough to sustain a long-continued siege, but if his lot is cast in a time of peace, his capabilities in this direction will never be known even to himself. There are to-day many members of the Church militant who are as courageous and faithful as the martyrs of the fifteenth century—many good soldiers of Jesus Christ who would prove themselves as valiant for the truth as those who have sealed it with their blood in bygone ages. But the spiritual power within them is hidden even from themselves, because the occasion to reveal it is wanting. It is evident that at this period of Saul's history the people of Israel were ignorant of his mental ability—they did not think he possessed the courage and the tact necessary to lead them to battle and to victory, but the attack of the Ammonite host furnished the needed occasion for the revelation of what was in him.

II. When God has called a man to any special work, he need not seek the occasion, because the occasion will seek him. When a vessel has been built for the ocean it will be certain to find an occasion to show what it is made of—the elements will seek it out and test the strength of its timbers and its power to weather the storm. Every wave that lashes its sides will furnish an occasion for it to prove what it can do. So when God has destined a man to any special service in the world, there is no need for that man to go out of his way to find an occasion to reveal what is in him. He who called him to the work will likewise give him the opportunity to reveal what he is fit for. Saul had been anointed to the kingship of Israel by the prophet of God, and his appointment had been ratified by lot, which was also an expression of the Divine will. He could, therefore, have felt no doubt in the matter. But he did not seek an occasion of displaying his fitness for the post of honour and responsibility to which he had been called, but returned to the occupation of his early life apparently in the belief that the occasion would not be wanting in which he might prove his ability to fulfil the duties of his new position. And the occasion sought him when the men of Gibeah told him the tidings brought by the messengers of Jabesh. So if any man feels that God has called him to any special work in the world, he need not seek an occasion to prove his fitness for it, for if there has been the call, He who called him will not let the occasion be wanting. If he gives himself up to Divine guidance, and faithfully discharges the duty which comes next to hand, God will take care of the rest. Paul

doubtless knew that God had chosen him to bear his name "before kings" (Acts ix. 15), but he did not go out of his way to find an occasion to do it. He who had destined him to the service provided the opportunity for him (Acts xxvi. 2, 2 Tim. iv. 16).

III. The action of one man is needed to make many men one in action. Men must have leaders—they must have some one around whom they can rally as a centre of unity if they are to band together to do anything in the world. And when one man of energy and ability concentrates all his own powers to a certain end, other men of less energy and ability will concentrate around him, and their united efforts will become a mighty power. The people of Israel at this time do not appear to have been unwilling to help their brethren of Gilead, but they did nothing but weep until Saul took the initiative and called upon them to follow him. When Saul's spirit was stirred within him by the Spirit of God to summon all Israel into the field, the fear of the Lord fell upon the people, and they came out "as one man" (see marginal rendering). Granted that there was a supernatural influence at work here, is not the Spirit of God behind all such great movements when their aim is the freedom of the human race or of any part of it? And does not God always move the mass to united action by first moving the heart of one man to take bold and decisive action? The decisive action of Luther at Worms was the fruit of the movement of the Spirit of God upon his soul, and it was the means of inciting the Protestant princes of Germany to united action in the defence of religious liberty.

IV. A conquest of personal enemies by forgiveness is more honourable to a man than a conquest of national enemies by the sword. One of Saul's successors has left it upon record that "he who ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city" (Prov. xvi. 32); and it is so because the first victory is more difficult to win, and is far more complete and lasting than the second. There are many men who are physically courageous with a kind of animal courage, who would not miss an opportunity to avenge a personal insult if the occasion offered—it is harder to overcome malice in the heart than an enemy on the field. But he who can do the first overcomes his enemy far more completely, for in the latter case it is only the body of the enemy which is overpowered by superior physical strength, and he will be ever on the watch to renew the attack. But to overcome a man by forgiveness takes the man's heart captive, and, by turning him into a friend, makes it certain that the conquest is a lasting one. Saul showed his fitness to be a king by his brilliant victory over the Ammonites, but he showed it more by his victory over himself when he said, concerning his former personal enemies, "There shall not a man be put to death this day."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 6. Without this zeal no anointed one may be found. For this word will always hold good: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord slothfully," (or negligently) (Jer. xlviii. 10). But in truth zeal alone is not the right ornament of the warriors of Christ. Prove thy zeal, whether it is not perhaps mixed with flesh and blood, or even proceeds altogether from this fountain, and know that zeal for the Lord's cause should not flow from mere excitability, from a momentary ebullition of natural compassion, or from being overcome by human displeasure and anger. Not the strange fire which the sons of Aaron took, but the fire from the holy altar, the Spirit of God—let us learn it from Saul!—must overmaster, inflame, inspire us.—*Disselhoff.*

Ver. 7. There are two sorts of fear. One is a selfish, reward-seeking fear.

In this we are caring for ourselves, and that is properly human fear. But there is also a fear of the Lord, the fear that one has for His sake alone, when one fears lest the Lord has been grieved through our own sins, or those of others, or lest we or others should not have sufficiently glorified Him in ourselves.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

Ver. 9. Bold assurance of faith, which in a great undertaking, anticipates its success as an accomplished fact.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 13. The victory over the foe is to Saul nothing but a saving act of God Himself. He regards himself as simply the instrument of God. This is the ground for the rejection of the demand; none should die that day. Thereby he gained a victory (1) over himself—he restrains himself in the exercise of a right; (2) over the anger of those who demanded that justice should be executed; (3) over his former opponents; (4) over the whole people, who must have been carried along by him in the path of noble moral conduct, and lifted above themselves to the height on which he stood.—*Lange's Commentary.*

As in God, so in His deputies, mercy and justice should be inseparable; wheresoever these two go asunder, government follows them into distraction and ends in ruin. If it had been a wrong offered to Samuel, the forbearance of the revenge had not been so commendable, although on the day of so happy a deliverance perhaps it had not been unseasonable; a man hath reason to be most bold with himself; it is no praise of mercy, since it is a fault of justice to remit another man's satisfaction; his own he may.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 15. How many instructive memorials of God's power and love to His people might suggest themselves to Saul at Gilgal (see Critical Notes). How many pledges and earnests to himself if he imitated Joshua in faith and obedience to God, especially at Gilgal!—*Wordsworth.*

How absurdly are our judgments led away by merely outward circumstances. Saul was not less the King of Israel, when following his herds at Gibeah, than when returning from the conquest of the Ammonites. His title rested on the Divine appointment, and was not *more sacred* because surrounded by the lustre of a victory; yet it appeared so in the eyes of the Israelites.—*Lindsay.*

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"And Samuel said," etc.** "The time and place of the following address are not given, but it is evident from the connection with the preceding chapter, and still more from the introduction and the entire contents of the address, that it was delivered on the renewal of the monarchy at Gilgal." *(Keil.)* **"I have hearkened."** etc. These words correspond exactly to the words in chap. viii. 7, 21. Samuel at the same time testifies indirectly to the fact that *he* had therein obeyed the command of God: "Hearken to the voice of the people." *(Erdmann.)* "By appointing a great part of this chapter (viz. to ver. 22) to be read in the synagogues as a Haphtarah to Numbers xvi., xvii. and xviii., the ancient Hebrew Church suggests the parallel between this speech of Samuel and the address of Moses in reply to Korah and his rebellious associates." *(Wordsworth.)*

Ver. 2. **"My sons are with you."** "They are reduced to the condition of private persons, and are subjects of the king, as ye are." *(Wordsworth.)* "Perhaps only an amplification of the words '*I am old* and grey-headed.' His grown-up sons were evidences of his age. Possibly, however, a tinge of mortified feeling at the rejection of himself and his family, mixed with a desire to recommend his sons to the good-will of the nation, is at the bottom of this mention of them." *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 3. "Witness against me." "The venerable judge, in resigning his magisterial authority, challenged the most minute inquiry into every act of his administration . . . History scarcely anywhere presents a more striking example of the moral sublime. *Grotius* compares Samuel to Aristides." *(Jamieson.)* "What Samuel here affirms of his official career stands in direct contrast with what is said in chap. viii. 3, of the blameworthy conduct of his sons; since it is inconceivable that he did not know, and had not now in mind the covetousness and perversion of judgment and the resulting discontent of the people, which was a co-factor in their desire for a royal government. The mode, as well as the fact and contents of the following justification, naturally suggest the statement in chap. viii. 3, and lead to the conclusion that this was the occasion of this (otherwise surprising) justification of his official career, on which in the eyes of the people a shadow had fallen in consequence of the opposite conduct of his sons." *(Erdmann.)* **"His anointed:"** "*i.e.*, of course, king Saul. The title Messiah, or anointed, had been given to the High Priests (Lev. iv. 3-5, etc.), and in Hannah's prophetic song and in the prophecy of the man of God sent to Eli, prophetic mention had been made of God's anointed; but this must be noted as the earliest instance of an actual king of Israel bearing the title of God's Christ, and thus typifying the true Messiah or Christ of God. The application of the term *anointed* to Saul, makes it probable that he had been publicly anointed by Samuel at Gilgal. The secret anointing, mentioned at chap. x. i., would not be notorious enough to explain the phrase to the whole people of Israel." *(Biblical Commentary.)* **"To blind mine eyes therewith,"** rather "that I should hide mine eyes at him." "The thought is not that the judge covers his eyes *from* the *copher* (or ransom) that he may not see the bribe, but that he covers his eyes *with* it, so as not to see and not to punish the crime committed." *(Keil.)* **"I will restore."** Compare Zaccheus's saying, Luke xix. 8. *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 6. "It is the Lord that advanced, etc." Literally *made*, *i.e.*, appointed them to their office. "The word make is to be understood of those excellent gifts which God had bestowed on Moses and his brother Aaron, that He might use their ministry in leading the people out of Egypt." *(Calvin.)* "Observe the constant reference to the Exodus as the well-known turning point of their national life." *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 7. "Stand still, that I may reason with you." "Both verbs have a forensic sense. They would be better rendered *stand up* (as if in a court of justice) *that I may contend with you before the Lord.* Samuel is, as it were, the advocate of Jehovah, vindicating the righteousness of His dealings with Israel, and throwing all the blame of their calamities on themselves (compare Stephen's speech, Acts vii.)." *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 9. "Samuel here introduces individual facts from the times of the Judges, but only prominent events as they occurred to him, neglecting their order, which was in itself unessential." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 11. "Bedan." This name does not occur in the book of Judges, and only in one other place in the Bible (1 Chron. vii. 17). As Samuel here places it between the names of two well-known Hebrew deliverers, many commentators agree with Kiel in believing that it is a copyist's error for Barak, the Hebrew letters in both words being nearly identical in form. **Samuel.** Some commentators here substitute *Samson*, thinking it more natural than that the prophet should mention himself, and omit the greatest of the judges. But Erdmann remarks that "Samuel could mention himself without exciting surprise, because he was conscious of his high mission as judge and deliverer, and the profound significance of his office for the history of Israel was universally recognised. By this mention of himself he honours not himself but the Lord, who had made him (like Moses and Aaron before) what he was (comp. vers. 6-9). Besides, it was under him that the yoke of the forty years dominion of the Philistines was broken, which work of deliverance Samuel was only able to begin."

Ver. 12. "And when ye saw that Nahash." "It hence appears not improbable that Nahash had made incursions into the Hebrew territory before the Israelites had demanded a king, and after his election had returned, and begun the siege of Jabesh." *(Clericus).*

Ver. 14. "Translate *If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, so as not to rebel against the mouth of the Lord, and will be (both you and your king that reigns over you) followers after the Lord your God.*" *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 17. "Is it not wheat-harvest to-day?" The wheat-harvest occurs in Palestine between the middle of May and the middle of June. "In ordinary seasons, from the cessation of the showers in spring until their commencement in October and November, rain never falls, and the sky is usually serene." *(Robinson.)* "Thunderings, as 'the voices of God' (Exod. ix. 28), are the harbingers of judgment." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 18. "Feared the Lord and Samuel." "Compare the very similar phrase (Exod. xiv. 31)." *(Biblical Commentary.)* "*Samuel* is added because he—as before by his word, so by his introduction of this manifestation, wonderful and contrary to the ordinary course of nature, of God's wrath—had displayed himself as instrument of the judicial power and glory of the God-king." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 21. "**Vain things,**" *i.e.*, the idols, "**because they are vain;**" literally *emptiness, i.e., worthless beings.*

Ver. 22. "**For His great name's sake,**" "*i.e.*, for the great name which He had acquired in the sight of all the nations by the marvellous guidance of Israel thus far to preserve it against misapprehension and blasphemy." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 24. "**How great things,**" etc. Some refer this to the miracle mentioned in verse 18, but the immediate connection seems to refer it to the mighty deliverances of which Samuel has just been reminding them.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

Samuel's Public Resignation of his Office.

I. A change of relationship or position naturally suggests a review of the past. When, on a journey, we have for some time been travelling in one direction, and we suddenly come to a turn in the road, we very naturally stand for a moment and look at the path which we have trodden, and which we are now about to quit. If we are journeying in a country with which we are unacquainted, such a review will probably be useful to us—it will help us to a more definite conception of our whereabouts. So when a man is about to enter into new relationships, whether of a private or public character, it is natural that he should look back upon the path which he has trodden up to the present moment, and if he do this in a right spirit it will be helpful to him in the future. It is good for a man to do this when he is about to undertake a position of responsibility, whether public or private; and it is good for him to do it also when he is about to resign any office of trust, whether to a single master or to his country. Happy will he be if at such a time he can, with Samuel, call God to witness that he has performed his duties faithfully. Samuel had, during a long life, been God's vicegerent in Israel; his public work was now about to cease, and consequently his relationship to the nation would be changed. It is not in egotism or boastfulness that he recalls the manner in which he has discharged his trust, or reminds them that by him (ver. 11) God had delivered them out of the hand of their enemies—such a review of the past was natural and right. But Samuel not only looks back upon the road by which he has arrived at the present turning-point in his life, he also bids the people whom he is addressing recall the steps by which they, as a nation, had arrived at the position in which they now stood. His relationship to them was about to undergo a change, which was in some respects the natural result of his advancing years, although it was partly due to the late national movement. But they had by their own choice taken an entirely new position, and assumed entirely new responsibilities; and although their sinful self-willed action in the past could not be recalled, yet many sins and much misery might be avoided in the future if they now gratefully and humbly remembered all the way by which the Lord their God had led them.

II. Whenever a nation rejects God, such rejection will be followed by signs of God's displeasure. The miracle which followed Samuel's words was a confirmation of their truth. It was a token that he was expressing the feelings of the Divine mind regarding Israel's conduct. The conception which Israel now had of a king was not God's conception, and their desire to have a king like the nations was a rejection of their Divine and invisible King. Hence this token of His displeasure. In later days this same nation rejected this Divine King when He came to them in human flesh, and they themselves then became what they have ever since remained—a sign to the entire human race of the danger of not

improving national privileges. Nations who do not find a God and King after their own heart in Him who is their rightful sovereign will make one after their own likeness (Psa. l. 21); but signs will not be wanting of His displeasure.

III. The servants of God sin against Him when they neglect to pray for their fellow countrymen. 1. *They ought to pray for them because they are their fellow creatures.* Paul, speaking by inspiration, desires that "*supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men . . . for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Tim. ii. 1, 3. 4.) 2. *Because national love ought to be an element in the character of every godly man.* The best men are ever deeply interested in the welfare of the nation to which they belong. Paul's love to "*his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh,*" notwithstanding all that he had suffered at their hands, was intense (Rom. ix. 1-3). And he who is a true patriot cannot serve his country so effectually in any other way as by praying for the godliness of the people, for a nation's greatness depends upon the relation of its individual members to the Living God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 2. I have hearkened to your voice, which was so violent and impetuous. Now you must hearken to my voice, and be told that after your peace-offerings God hath still a quarrel with you.—*Trapp.*

God will not let his people run away with the arrearages of their sins, but, when they least think of it, calls them to account. All this while was God angry with their rejection of Samuel; yet, as if there had been nothing but peace, He gives them a victory over their enemies, He gives way to their joy in their election. . . . . God may be angry enough with us, while we outwardly prosper: it is the wisdom of God to take His best advantages; He suffers us to go on till we should come to enjoy the fruit of our sin, till we seem past the danger either of conscience or of punishment; then, even when we begin to be past the feeling of our sin, we shall begin to feel His displeasure for our sins. This is only where He loves, where He would both forgive and reclaim: He hath now to do with His Israel; but where He means utter vengeance, He lets men harden themselves to a reprobate senselessness, and make up their own measure without contradiction as purposing to reckon with them but once for ever.—*Bp. Hall.*

Vers. 2, 3. Samuel's life is both an example and a rebuke. 1. *An example.* To stand forth and make so successful an appeal must have presented to Saul an illustrious example of personal excellence and of public probity. He thus saw that it was possible to live in high places and be a righteous man; to administer the state, and retain integrity; to direct the concerns of millions, and receive their spontaneous and unanimous approval—truths which few governors have ever found. . . . . He was also an example to the whole people; for the same goodness that made him faithful, with his many talents and his many trusts, could supply them with ability to use theirs with fidelity. 2. *A rebuke.* The unimpeachable life of Samuel was a great rebuke to Israel. They had not improved his ministry, and had grown weary of so godly a regime as his. . . . Every good man's life condemns the world that refuses to follow his way.—*Steel.*

Ver. 9. When God's people abandon Him, He, by virtue of the same righteousness which blesses them if they are faithful, abandons them to their enemies, who enslave and oppress them. The "selling" refers to the right of the father to sell his children

as slaves, here exercised by God as the extremest paternal right, as it were. (Judges ii. 14; iii. 8; iv. 2, 9. Deut. xxxii. 10. Isa. l. 1; lii. 3. Ezek. xxx. 12.)—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 13. In this declaration is set forth the origin of Saul's kingly position—(1) on its human side, by the words: Whom ye have chosen; (2) on its divine side, by the words: Behold, the Lord hath set a king over you—your demand sprang from an evil root, yet hath the Lord granted it; this king, though chosen and demanded by you, is yet alone the work of God. By these words is confirmed the truth, that the Lord is and remains king.—*Erdmann.*

Vers. 14, 15. *With whom or against whom is the hand of the Lord?* The answer to this question depends on the following considerations:—1. whether one has, or has not, given himself to be the Lord's with his whole heart—*(a)* in true *fear* of God, *(b)* *in* true service of God. 2. Whether one is, or is not, in his *will* thoroughly obedient to the will of the Lord—*(a)* hearkening unconditionally to His word, *(b)* not resisting His commandments. 3. Whether one is, or is not, in his whole walk ready to follow the Lord in His guidance—*(a)* keeping in the way pointed out by Him, *(b)* keeping in view the goal set up by Him.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Here is a precedent for preachers, who must one while chide their people, another while comfort them, and always pray for them. They must turn themselves into all shapes and fashions of speech and of spirit to bring men home to God. This is an excellent way of preaching, to mingle promises with threatenings. Sour and sweet makes the best sauce.—*Trapp.*

Verses 16—19. I. Unseasonable weather is one of God's punishments. We suffer sometimes from lack of rain to moisten the earth and prevent the miseries of drought. Such a calamity was inflicted upon Israel on account of sin in the days of Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 1). At other times rain is unseasonable and injurious, as was the case in the present instance. It comes at the call of the prophet, to mar the fruits of the earth, and to injure the harvest, that the people "might perceive their wickedness to be great." II. We must ask for fair and seasonable weather upon no other condition than that of repentance. We must bring forth fruits meet for repentance, if we expect that the earth should bring forth fruits meet for our sustenance; for God sometimes sees fit to withhold these blessings, to make us know their worth by the want of them. He is sometimes pleased to send us an abundance of good things to see how we will use them, and whether we will grow better by them. But if we consume them upon our lusts, as Israel did here, instead of having more, that which we have shall be taken away.—*Matthew Hole.*

Men have so many ways of shifting off their own guilt that unless they be taken in the act they will hardly confess it, and when convicted of the fact they will deny the fault or the measure. To cut off all excuses, therefore, Samuel appeals to God, the highest judge, for His sentence, and dares trust to a miraculous conviction. Had not Samuel before consulted with his Maker, and received warrant for this act, that would have been presumption which was now a noble improvement of faith. . . . . Rather than Israel shall go clear away with a sin, God will accuse and arraign them from heaven. No sooner hath Samuel's voice ceased than God's voice begins. Every crack of thunder spake vengeance against the rebellious Israelites, and every drop of rain was a witness of their sin. Now they found that they had displeased Him who rules in heaven by rejecting the man who ruled for Him on earth.—*Bishop Hall.*

The elements are exclusively under the control of the Creator, and He alone can say what shall be in relation to the clouds; yet for special ends—generally moral ends—they have occa-

sionally been placed for a season at the service of men. This instance is a parallel to that which occurred in Egypt (Exod. ix. 23).

The revelation of the Lord's power through Samuel has for its aim—I. To glorify the name of God, and to exhibit the people's high calling as chosen people and God's property. II. To show more strikingly the people's sin and thereby induce sincere repentance. III. To show the penitent people the source of consolation and help, and fix in their hearts the ground of hope for future salvation.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Vers. 20, 21. *A threefold word of exhortation to penitent sinners.* 1. A word *reminding* of past sin. "Ye have done all this wickedness." 2. A word consolingly *pointing* to Divine grace. "Fear not." 3. A word *exhorting* to fidelity. "Turn not aside from the Lord."—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 23. In this Samuel sets a glorious example to all rulers, showing them that they should not be led astray by the ingratitude of their subordinates or subjects, and give up on that account all interest in their welfare, but should rather persevere all the more in their anxiety for them.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

Moses and Samuel are specified by God as having extraordinary power with Him (Jer. xv. 1); and why? Because they prayed for their enemies. —*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 24. I. Fear and service go together. *Serve the Lord in fear, saith David* (Psa. ii. 11); *Fear the Lord and serve Him, saith Joshua* (Josh. xxiv. 14); and, fear ever before service; for that, unless our service proceed from fear, it is hollow and worthless. . . . . Behold the same tongue that bade them not fear (ver. 20), now bids them fear; and the same Spirit that tells us they feared exceedingly (ver. 18), now enjoins them to fear more. What shall we make of this? Their other fear was at the best initial; for now they began to repent: and, as one says of this kind of fear, that it hath two eyes fixed upon two divers objects, so had this of theirs: one eye looked upon the rain and thunder, the other looked up to the God that sent it. The one of these is borrowed of the slavish or hostile fear, as Basil calls it, the other of the filial; for the slavish fear casts both eyes upon the punishment; the filial looks with both eyes upon the party offended. Samuel would rectify and perfect this affection, and would bring them from the fear of slaves, through the fear of penitents, to the fear of sons: and indeed one of these makes way for another. It is true that *perfect love thrusts out fear;* but it is as true that fear brings in that perfect love which is joined with the reverence of sons: like the needle or bristle, as one compares it, draws in the thread after it. The compunction of fear, saith Gregory, fits the mind for the compunction of love. We shall never rejoice truly in God except it be with trembling; except we have quaked at His thunder, we shall never joy in His sunshine. . . . . II. As our service must be grounded on fear, so our fear must be reduced to service. Indeed, the worst kind of fear is that we call servile; but the best fear is the fear of servants; for there is no servant of God but fears filially. And God hath no son but he serves. . . . . We all know what service means; for we all are, or were, I imagine, either servants or masters, or servants of the public, or masters of servants, or all these. We cannot, therefore, be ignorant either of what we require of ours, or what our superiors require of us. If service consisted only in wearing of liveries, in taking of wages, in making of courtesies, and kissing of hands, there were nothing more easy or more common. . . . . But be not deceived: the life of service is work: the work of a Christian is obedience to the law of God.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 25. I. If there be a moral

governor of the universe, sin must provoke him. II. If sin provoke God, He is able to punish it. III. Bodies of men are punishable in this world only; in eternity there are no families, churches, nations. If, therefore, a country is to be destroyed, it is tried, and condemned, and executed here. IV. There is a tendency in the very nature of sin to injure and ruin a country. It violates all the duties of relative life; it destroys subordination; it relaxes the ties which bind mankind together, and makes them selfish and mean; it renders men enemies to each other. Social welfare cannot survive the death of morals and virtue.—*Jay.*

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1. A literal rendering of the Hebrew text in this verse would stand thus—*Saul was years old when he began to reign, and he reigned , and two years over Israel.* The Hebrew numerals have evidently fallen out, and nearly all commentators agree that this verse, according to the custom in the history of the kings (2 Sam. ii. 10, v. 4; 1 Kings xiv. 21, xxii. 42; 2 Kings viii. 26) originally gave the age at which Saul began to reign and the number of years that his reign lasted. Some, however, understand that Saul had been publicly made king by Samuel one year before the events recorded in the preceding chapter, and that when he had reigned two years, he did what is recorded in this chapter. Bishop Hervey, who agrees with Keil and Erdmann in adopting the first-named view, says, in the *Biblical Commentary*, "There is no certain clue to the exact numbers to be supplied; but Saul may have been about thirty at his accession, as a scholion to the Sept. has it, and have reigned some thirty-two years, since we know that his grandson Mephibosheth was five years old at Saul's death (2 Sam. iv. 4): and thirty-two added to the seven and a half years between the death of Saul and that of Ishbosheth, makes up the forty years assigned to Saul's dynasty in Acts xiii. 21. Neither is there any clue to the interval of time between the events recorded in the preceding chapter and those which follow in this and succeeding chapters. But the appearance of Jonathan as a warrior (ver. 2) compared with the mention of Saul as a young man at chap. ix. implies an interval of not less than ten or fifteen years, perhaps more." Keil and Erdmann, however, agree in placing the acts of Saul recorded in verse 2 immediately after the events narrated in the last chapter. As no other summoning of the people is mentioned before except that for the Ammonite war, and as a gathering of all the fighting population is implied in the last clause of verse 2, they assume as probable that it was at Gilgal, immediately after a renewal of the monarchy, that Saul resolved at once to make war upon the Philistines.

Ver. 2. "Michmash." "This town has been identified with great probability with a village which still bears the name of Muhkmas, about seven miles north of Jerusalem, on the northern edge of the great *Wady Suweinit*, which forms the main pass of communication between the central highlands on which the village stands, and the Jordan valley at Jericho." (*Biblical Dictionary.*) **"Mount Bethel."** The ancient town of Bethel was situated on very high ground, about 10 miles west of Jerusalem, in the same direction as Michmash. Mount Bethel was probably the mountain range upon which the city was situated." **"Jonathan."** Here mentioned for the first time. "A name which means, gift of Jehovah. In name and character he is the Nathaniel of this history." (*Wordsworth.*) **"Gibeah of Benjamin."** The residence of Saul, probably the present *Tuliel-el-Ful*, "a conspicuous eminence just four miles north of Jerusalem to the right of the road." (*Biblical Dictionary.*)

Ver. 3. "Geba." "Identified by most writers with the modern *Jeba*, standing on the south side of the *Wady-Suweinit*, exactly opposite to Michmash. **"Let the Hebrews hear,"** etc. "Not only as a joyful message, but also as an indirect summons to the whole nation to rise." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 5. "Thirty thousand chariots." The immense disproportion which this number bears to the people, and the fact that the Syriac and Arabic versions read *three thousand*, has led most critics to suppose that there is here an error in the Hebrew manuscripts. "Solomon had only fourteen hundred chariots, which are mentioned as a large number (2 Chron. i. 14). Some suppose the baggage waggons are included in the number. Probably the Philistines may have engaged other nations, the enemies of Israel, to fight with them, and this supposition is confirmed by the mention of the number of the people 'as the sand,' etc., and also by the confusion of the army, which is mentioned in chap. xiv. 20, and which was due in part to the fact that it was composed of various nations." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 6. "When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait," etc. "The position of matters seems to have been this: The Philistines were in possession of the village of *Geba*, on the south side of the *Wady Suweinit*. In their front across the Wady, which is here about a mile wide, and divided by several swells lower than the side eminences, was Saul in the town of Michmash, and holding also *Mount Bethel*—the heights on the north of the great Wady—as far as Beitin (Bethel) itself. South of the Philistine camp, and about three miles in its rear, was Jonathan, in Gibeah-of-Benjamin, with a thousand chosen warriors. The first step was taken by Jonathan, who drove out the Philistines from Geba by a feat of arms which at once procured for him immense reputation. But in the meantime it increased the difficulties of Israel, for the Philistines hearing of their reverse, and advancing with an enormous armament, pushed Saul's little force before them out of Bethel and Michmash and down the eastern passes to Gilgal, near Jericho, in the Jordan valley. They then established themselves at Michmash, formerly the head-quarters of Saul, and from thence sent out their bands of plunderers north, west, and east (verses 17, 18). But nothing could dislodge Jonathan from his main stronghold in the south. As far as we can disentangle the complexities of the story, he soon relinquished Geba and consolidated his little force in Gibeah, where he was joinnd by his father, with Samuel the prophet and Ahiah the priest, who, perhaps, remembering the former fate of the ark, had brought down the sacred ephod from Shiloh (chap. xiv. 3). These three had made their way up from Gilgal with a force sorely diminished from desertion to the Philistine camp and flight (ver. 7 and chap. xiv. 21)—a mere remnant of the people following in the rear of the little band (ver. 15). Then occurred the feat of the hero and his armour-bearer (chap. xiv.) *(Biblical Dictionary)*. **"The people did hide themselves," etc.** "The broken ridges of the neighbourhood would afford abundant hiding-places. The rocks are perforated in every direction with crevices and fissures, sunk deep in the rocky soil, subterranean granaries or dry wells in the adjoining fields." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 8. "And he tarried seven days," etc. See note on chap. x. 8. "This appointment seems to have been for a trial of faith and obedience." *(Biblical Commentary.)* Samuel came on the seventh day, but not until towards its close. **"And he offered,"** etc. The words do not necessarily imply that Saul did this with his own hand; it is quite possible that he merely commanded the priest to do it. If so, his sin was simply that of disobedience to the command of God, as given by Samuel. Dean Stanley, Dr. Kitto, and others, think that he was guilty of the double offence of usurping the office of the priest and of disobedience to the Divine word. Wordsworth observes that "Samuel does not animadvert to any such intrusion on Saul's part."

Ver. 14. "The Lord hath sought him a man." "It is natural to infer from this that David, who of course is indicated, was already grown to man's estate, as we know his friend Jonathan was. But as David was only thirty years old when he began to reign, the incident here related must have occurred during the last ten or fifteen years of Saul's reign." *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 15. "Six hundred men." "Saul had therefore, by his hasty, disobedient conduct, not attained his purpose of holding the people together. The declaration, 'Thou hast done foolishly, is thus confirmed." (*Erdmann.*)

Vers. 16-23. "The following account is no doubt connected with the foregoing, so far as facts are concerned, inasmuch as Jonathan's brave, heroic deed terminated the war for which Saul had entreated the help of God by his sacrifice at Gilgal; but it is not formally connected with it, so as to form a compact and complete account of the successive stages of the war." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 17. "The spoilers came out," etc. The places here mentioned, so far as they can be identified, lay respectively on the north, west, and east—that is to say, the predatory bands sallying from Michmash ravaged through the valleys which radiate from it in those directions.

Ver. 19. "There was no smith," etc. This policy of disarming the natives has often been followed. "So Porsenna allowed the Romans iron implements for agriculture only." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 20. "Share, coulter," etc. "In Isaiah ii. 4, and Joel iii. 10, the word here rendered *coulter* is rendered *ploughshare*, and the word here rendered *share*, from its etymology, must have that meaning; we must therefore suppose there was some difference in the two implements which cannot now be ascertained. The word signifying *mattock*, or some such cutting instrument, is nearly identical with that rendered *share*." (*Biblical Dictionary.*)

Ver. 21. The meaning of this verse is obscure, and the renderings of it very diverse. Gesenius and many Hebrew scholars read "And so there was dulness or notching of the edge." "The parenthesis indicates that the result of the burdensome necessity of going to the Philistines was that many tools became useless by dulness, so that even this poorer sort of arms did the Israelites not much service at the breaking out of the war." (*Bunsen.*)

Ver. 22. "**So . . . there was neither sword nor spear found**" "They had no weapons of defence but their rude implements of husbandry. But by means of these a bold energetic militia could do great execution; and in the well-known instances of the royalist peasantry of La Vendee or the Hays of Cramond, in Scotland, we have examples of the alert and effective manner in which a pastoral or agricultural people can arm themselves at a moment's notice." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 23 "**The passage of Michmash.**" The open valley between Geba and Michmash (see note on verse 6). "It is about a mile broad at this point, but contracts in its descent eastward to the Jordan into a narrow, precipitous defile." (*Jamieson.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

Saul's First Act of Disobedience.

I. Humiliation of a nation following distrust of God. Saul "chose him three thousand men," etc. This band of men seems to have been intended to act as a body-guard to Saul and his son, and to form a kind of standing army for the defence of the nation. In this act Saul was only following the general custom of human monarchs, who need the arms and strength of their subjects to protect themselves and to help them to defend their country. But this was quite a new thing in Israel, and it was a humiliation for the nation. It had hitherto been their glory that their king needed no arm of flesh to protect his person, nor any standing army to defend them from their enemies. He who had legions of angels to do His bidding could well dispense with the service of a human body-guard, and so long as they continued obedient to His word there was no need of a standing army in their midst to defend them from their enemies. Even when they had through disobedience been given over for a season into the hands of the heathen, their mighty and invisible King had always raised up deliverers so soon as they had by confession and promises of amendment returned to Him. This act of Saul must have forcibly reminded the Hebrew nation that they had now indeed got what they desired—a "king like all the nations" (chap. viii 4), and if they had reflected they would have felt humiliated in contrasting the comparative weakness of even the brave and warlike Saul with the omnipotent strength which they had rejected. But an act of distrust in Divine power is always followed by humiliation.

II. Humiliation of a monarch following disobedience to God. God is a ruler who demands and deserves unconditional obedience. An absolute monarch ought to be so wise that all the wisdom of all his subjects put together is not equal to that which he possesses. And His goodness ought so to exceed the goodness of the best and most benevolent subjects of his realm that all his plans and purposes, and hence all his commands, will be more adapted to the welfare of every citizen than any plans which their united wisdom and benevolence could form. Unless a ruler can establish beyond doubt that he is thus immeasurably superior to all whom he desires to obey him, he has no right to demand from them unconditional obedience. But if such an one can be found, it is surely to the interest of all whom he commands to render it. God is such a King—the "King who can do no wrong,"—and as such He demands and deserves obedience to all His commands although his subjects may not always see why He so commands them. This absolute obedience was the condition upon which alone He had promised to continue to be with Israel and with Israel's king (chap. xii. 14, 15). His past dealings with the nation, as Samuel had reminded them at Gilgal, fully justified this demand upon their loyalty, and Saul's individual experience ought to have made him deeply sensible that nothing less would be accepted by that Absolute Ruler who had placed him on the throne. That the command came to Saul through the word of Samuel

made no difference—the command of a king is none the less binding because it is delivered through the mouth of a subject, and Saul knew full well that God spoke through the mouth of His prophet. Consider—1. *The root of this act of disobedience.* It was distrust. It is quite evident that Saul had been commanded to remain at Gilgal until Samuel should arrive, and to postpone the sacrifices which were to precede any action against the Philistines until the prophet's arrival. There is no doubt that Saul would then have received Divine direction as to his future movements, and that the expedition against the national enemies would have been followed by signs of the Divine approval. But Samuel's arrival was delayed until the last day of the appointed time without doubt to test Saul's faith in the Divine word. Help on all occasions and in all extremities had been most certainly promised him on condition that he, the king, as well as his people, followed after the Lord (chap. xii. 14); and an opportunity was now afforded him of proving whether he believed the promise. By his own confession he doubted it. "Thou camest not within the days appointed, and the Philistines gathered themselves together to Michmash, therefore said I, the Philistines will come down upon me at Gilgal." This was saying, in effect, that he doubted whether God and God's prophet would be as good as their word. The dishonour offered to Samuel was in reality a dishonour offered to God, inasmuch as he was doubtless acting under Divine direction—a fact of which it was impossible that Saul could be ignorant. The step from distrust to disobedience is easily taken—indeed the one is almost certain to lead to the other. While there is an unshaken confidence in the character of another there will be a loyal adherence to his commands, for confidence in his character and wisdom will beget an assurance that he will only command what is just and right. And this is especially true of man in his attitude towards God; hence it is the great aim of the tempter of men to beget in them distrust of God, in order to lead them to disobedience to God. He did this with our first parents. All the questions which he put to Eve evidently had for their object the infusion into her mind of a suspicion whether, after all, God was the benevolent Being she had hitherto believed Him to be. If Saul's confidence in God had been firm, we should have never had this record upon the page of Bible history. 2. *The punishment which it brought upon Saul.* At first sight it may appear a very severe one. That Saul should be rejected by God from being the founder of a kingly dynasty for a single act of disobedience may seem upon the surface to be a sentence out of proportion to the gravity of the act. But it must be remembered that disobedience to a plain command is a very great sin. Saul could not plead as an excuse that he had misunderstood what he was required to do, or that the will of God had been implied rather than expressed; he does, in fact, put in neither of these excuses. He admits that he knew what his directions were, and that he had knowingly and deliberately acted in opposition to them. As in the disobedience of the first man, the plainness of the command, "Thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. ii. 17), made the eating an act of open defiance of the sovereignty of Jehovah, so it was in this case. The man who had been raised from herding cattle to be God's vicegerent in Israel, here lifts the standard of open rebellion against his Sovereign. Then, again, an act of disobedience is aggravated by the high position of the offender. A common soldier who disobeys martial law is punished for his crime; but if the commander of the army violates it, he meets with a much more severe sentence. Men recognise the fact that the transgression of such a man deserves a heavier penalty, because his high and representative position makes his observance of law doubly obligatory. Such a man ought to be a living embodiment of obedience; he ought to show to those who are socially beneath him a life in perfect accordance with every jot and tittle the law by which his very position implies that he is governed. Saul as king

of Israel was bound by obligations above all his subjects to observe every Divine command with the strictest fidelity. Upon his acts depended to a very great extent the moral tone of the entire nation—if he treated the word of the Lord as a word to be regarded or set aside as his humour dictated, many of his subjects would surely do the same. The welfare of the Hebrew commonwealth demanded therefore that so open and glaring act of defiance should be visited with a public and severe penalty. The spirit in which Saul met Samuel's question, "What hast thou done?" shows also that there was no repentance after the deed The words of the prophet seem framed to beget some acknowledgment of guilt—the very sight of the man who had been the channel by which all the favours of Jehovah had come to him, and from whose mouth he had received so many messages from the Most High God was calculated to beget in him some sense of his guilt. But there is no parallel to David's—"I have sinned against the Lord" (2. Sam. xii. 13)—he meets Samuel's question with words which have no ring of repentance about them—which show no sense of the greatness of the sin he had committed. When we consider all the circumstances which surround this act we can see that the sentence was not heavier than the sin. 3. *Its woeful miscarriage in the immediate future.* Saul's excuse for the act was the urgency of the situation—the danger which threatened the people at the hand of the Philistines. He pleads that he had disobeyed God in order to obtain from Him a fulfilment of His promises—that he hoped by breaking His law to bring that success to his arms which had been promised only on condition of obedience. Well might Samuel say, "Thou hast done foolishly," and the foolishness of sin was soon afterwards the bitter experience of both king and people. In nature God has certain laws, or established methods of working, by which good things come into the hand of men. But men must work in harmony with them and not in opposition to them if they would be partakers of the good. If a man expected to obtain the same results by acts which were in direct opposition to the known and established laws of the universe, he would be accounted nothing less than a madman. And there are physical laws the defiance of which all men know will not only be followed by no gain but with physical loss. No rational man thinks that he can throw himself over a precipice, for instance, and escape bodily injury and pain. Disobedience to the laws which govern matter can never bring the same results as obedience, and men never expect that it will do so. They know that if they "break" this hedge, "a serpent will bite them" (Eccles. x. 8). But many a man, besides the first king of Israel, has acted as if he expected that observance and non-observance of moral law would be followed by the same results. Saul desired to defeat the Philistines, and God had promised to stand by him and his army so long as they clave to Him. But Saul here acts as though he expected to obtain the same blessing by forsaking God as by following Him! He offers a burnt offering to the Being whom he is defying, and looks for the same results as if he were walking in obedience to His word. But God's moral laws, like his physical ones, go as straight forward as the mighty wheels in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. i. 17). Yea, they are far more fixed and unalterable, and the penalty of breaking them far more certain. God has suspended the laws of His physical universe, but never one of the laws of His moral kingdom. It is a law as firm as the throne of God, that "whatsoever a man soweth," in moral acts, "that he shall also reap" (Gal. vi. 7), and men only make manifest their exceeding foolishness by expecting otherwise. When Saul found his two thousand men diminish to six hundred, and when the whole land was devastated by incursions of the heathen spoilers, both king and people knew from bitter experience that he does wisely who keeps the commandments of the Lord, and that there is no folly to compare with the foolishness of sin.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 8, 13. The first test of faith, which Saul had to submit to, was a *theocratic necessity;* for Saul must first prove to the Lord by deeds that he wished to be unconditionally subject to the Lord's will, to yield obedience to His word which was to be revealed to him by prophets, and to trust alone to His help. Such tests as Saul had to stand, are, in the life of princes and peoples, and of individuals, in the church as in every member of God's people, a divine *significance;* failure to stand them leads many from the Lord, brings to naught God's purposes, results in misfortune and destruction. The *individual elements* of Saul's probation, the typical significance of which elements for all times and circumstances of the kingdom of God is obvious, are found partly in his outward position, partly in his inner life. The *external position* of Saul, as to time and place, was one of extreme *distress.* . . . . This distressing and dangerous position gave occasion in *his heart* to the temptation to act contrary to God's *will and command.* In the first place *fear* of the threatening danger seized on his heart; to fear joined itself *impatience,* which prevented him from waiting out the time appointed by Samuel; this produced *unquiet* in his mind, which drove him to take self-willed measures to help himself, and dissipated more and more his trust in God; then came *sophistical calculation* by his carnally obscured understanding; his heart frame towards God of immovable *trust* and *unconditional obedience* was given up. It was the root of *unbelief* from which all this sprang.—*Lange's Commentary.*

I. Sin is not estimated by God according to its outward form, but according to the amount and extent of the principle of evil embodied in that form. There may be as much of downright rebellion against God in what men would call a little sin, as in a series of what men would call flagrant offences. And when we say of a requirement of God that it was so small a matter as to render it marvellous that God should visit its violation with a penalty, we should remember that the smaller it was the more readily ought obedience to have been rendered, and the greater the proof of a wrong disposition, when obedience was refused, even in a little thing. II. The first wrong step is always marked by a peculiarity of evil which does not attach to any subsequent offences. Men are accustomed to palliate the first offence, because it is the first; a more accurate estimate would show that this habit of judging is thoroughly erroneous and fallacious. There is more to keep a man from committing a first offence, than there is to keep him from committing a second or any other criminal act. The impression of the command is at least one degree deeper than it can possibly be after it has been trifled with. The first sin involves the taking up of a new position, and this is harder work than to maintain it. It is assuming a character of disobedience, and this requires more hardihood than to wear it when it has once been put on. It is breaking through consistency, which is a strong barrier so long as it remans unbroken; but if once broken through sin becomes easy. All these things call on us, in fairness, to reverse our judgments on first offences; they suggest that these have an aggravation about them which belong not to other sins; and we thus are the less surprised that God, whose every judgment is right, should have visited Saul's first offence with peculiar displeasure.—*Miller.*

Our faith is most commendable in the last act; it is no praise to hold out until we be hard driven; then, when we are forsaken of means, to live by faith in our God is worthy of a crown.—*Bp. Hall.*

I. This portion of Scripture history teaches us the danger of infringing or trifling with the Divine commandments on the plea of *necessity.* . . . . There are many who would hesitate at the employment of dishonest, or even

questionable means for the advancement of their interests generally, who would nevertheless occasionally, and under difficult and trying circumstances, dispense with the Divine law, and plead the peculiar necessity of the case for their justification. They are too apt to suppose that such a deviation from their known duty is rendered necessary, and excusable, from the urgency of their peculiar situation. . . . . Could there be any case of greater urgency than Saul's? Who can pretend to show a greater or more plausible necessity for deviating from a command of God? Yet his plea was utterly vain. II. The infatuation of supposing that, while disregarding the *essentials* of religion, faith and obedience, he could satisfy God with its *forms*. . . . . All external rites and forms are only valuable as means conducive to internal and practical piety; and, consequently, are so far from compensating for the want of this, that, without it, they become an unmeaning and unavailing service.—*Lindsay.*

Ver. 13. It may probably strike many readers that foolishness is not exactly the term they would have employed in characterising the conduct of the king. They would have thought of "presumption," of "self-will," of "distrust," and other like terms, but scarcely of foolishness. But the prophet's word is the right one after all. It goes to the root of the matter. . . . . In his view and in that of all sacred writers, the lowest depths of human foolishness—its most astonishing and incredible manifestation—was in disobedience to the Lord's commandment. There are two kinds of fools prominently noticed in Scripture—the fool who denies that there is any God—and the fool who does not obey God, though he does not deny His existence. . . . . And yet, if we probe the matter closely, we shall find that there is scarcely more than an impalpable film of real difference between them. . . . One may as well believe there is no God as not obey Him.—*Kitto.*

Ver. 14. The phrase "a man after God's own heart," has no reference to the piety or virtues of private and personal character; for no mere man in that respect has come up to the standard of the Divine law. It is used solely with regard to official fidelity in the service of Jehovah in Israel (chap. ii.35); and David was certainly entitled to be characterised as "a man after God's own heart," from his ardent zeal and undeviating exertions for the interests of the true religion, in opposition to idolatry.—*Jamieson.*

1. A man devout, not merely by fits and starts, but profoundly and habitually. 2. A man not self-willed, who would rule according to the command of God through the prophets. 3. A man who, when he had done wrong, would penitently submit to God's chastenings, invincibly trust in God's goodness, and faithfully strive to live more according to God's will. (In these and similar points Saul and David might be contrasted).—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 15. Saul's sinful act in offering sacrifice lest the people should be scattered from him, failed of its purpose. Wordly policy does not attain even its own temporal ends (See John xi. 48). "If we let this man thus alone, the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." They did not let Jesus alone; and therefore the Romans did come, and destroyed them.—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES. Ver. 1. **"Garrison of the Philistines."** The advanced post mentioned in chap. xiii. 23. For the situation of the armies see note on chap. xiii. 6.

Ver. 2. **"A pomegranate tree," etc.**, rather *the* pomegranate, a well-known tree. "According to Judges xx. 45, a rock near Gibeah bore the name 'Rock of the pomegranate' (*Rimmon*), and was well adapted for a fortified position. It is a natural supposition that the same rock is meant here, named after the well-known pomegranate." (*Erdmann.*) This is the more probable because a pomegranate tree is not sufficiently high to admit of the erection of a tent beneath its branches. **"Migron."** A place of this name is mentioned in Isa. x. 28. Its exact site is not known, but it lay in this neighbourhood. It may be, however, that this spot is another of the same name, as the word signifies a *precipice*, and the entire district is rocky and precipitous. **"Six hundred men."** "His forces, then, had not increased since he came to Gibeah, as might have been expected." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 3. **"Ahiah, the son of Ahitub."** This man was therefore a great-grandson of Eli. He is generally supposed to be the same person as *Abimelech*, mentioned in chap. xxii. 9, 11. The signification of *Abijah* (as it ought to be written) is "Friend of Jehovah," and that of *Abimelech* is Friend of the King, viz., of Jehovah. It is quite possible, however, that Ahiah may have died without sons, and been succeeded by a brother named Abimelech. **"The Lord's priest in Shiloh."** "As Eli was so emphatically known and described as God's priest in Shiloh, and as there is every reason to believe that Shiloh was no longer the seat of the ark (see chap xxii.; 1 Chron. xiii. 3-5), it is far better to refer these words to Eli. . . . This fragment of genealogy is a very valuable help to the chronology. The grandson of Phinehas, the son of Eli, was now High Priest; and Samuel, who was probably a few years older than Ahitub, was now an old man. All this indicates a period of about fifty years or upward from the taking of the ark by the Philistines." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 4. **"Between the passages," etc.** The ground is thus described by Robinson in his *Biblical Researches*—"In the gorge or valley are two hills of a conical or rather spherical form, having steep rocky sides, with small wadies running up behind each, so as almost to isolate them. One is on the side towards Geba, and the other on the side towards Michmash. These would seem to be the two rocks mentioned in Jonathan's adventure. They are not indeed so sharp as the language of Scripture would seem to imply, but they are the only rocks of the kind in the vicinity." In his *Later Researches* he says, "The ridges on either side of the valley exhibit two elevated points which project into the great wady; and the easternmost of these bluffs on each side were probably the outposts of the two garrisons of the Philistines and the Israelites. The road passes around the eastern side of the southern hill, the post of Israel, and then strikes over the western part of the northern one, the post of the Philistines and the scene of Jonathan's adventure. These hills struck us now, more than formerly, as of sharp ascent, and as appropriate to the circumstances of the narrative. They are isolated cliffs in the valley, except so far as the low ridge, at the end of which they are found, connected them back with the higher ground on each side."

Ver. 6. **These uncircumcised.** "It is remarkable that this epithet, used as a term of reproach, is confined almost exclusively to the Philistines. This is probably an indication of the long continued oppression of the Israelites by the Philistines, and their frequent wars." (*Biblical Commentary.*) **"May be."** "This indicates not a doubt but the humility which was coupled with Jonathan's heroic spirit." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 10. **"This shall be a sign,"** etc. "All attempts to bring Jonathan's conduct within the rules of ordinary human action are vain. Though it is not expressly said, as in the case of Gideon (Judges vi. 34), Othniel (iii. 10), and others, that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, yet the whole course of the narrative, especially verses 13-16, indicates an extraordinary Divine interposition and tends to place Jonathan on the same platform as the judges and saviours of Israel." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 11. **"Behold the Hebrews come forth."** **"As it could not occur to the sentries** that two men had come with hostile designs, it was a natural conclusion that they were Israelite deserters; and hence no attempt was made to hinder their ascent, or stone them, as they were scrambling up the ridge." (*Jamieson.*) **"Come up to us,"** etc. "They hoped to have sport with them, not supposing that they could there climb the rock." (*Clericus.*)

Ver. 14. **"Twenty men within, as it were, an half acre of land."** *Rather a half furrow of a yoke of land.* "This indicates the position of the fallen, after Jonathan, pressing impetuously on had struck them down one after another, and his armour-bearer after him, had killed those that were not dead. This occurred in the space of about half a furrow in a piece of land which one with a yoke of oxen could plough in a day." (*Erdmann.*) "Their terror and flight

are perfectly conceivable, if we consider that the outposts of the Philistines were so stationed upon the top of the ridge of the steep mountain wall that they could not see how many were following, and the Philistines could not imagine it possible that two Hebrews would have ventured to climb the rock alone and make an attack upon them. Sallust relates a similar occurrence in connection with the scaling of a castle in the Numidian war. Bell. Jugurtha. c. 89, 90." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 15. "**The earth quaked.**" Keil and others think that it merely trembled "with the noise and tumult of the frightened foe," but there can be no reason why it should not be understood to describe a real earthquake—a supernatural interposition of God. "Just as a strong east wind" divided the waters of the Red Sea; just as the great hailstones smote the Canaanites to death "at the going down of Bethhoron" (Josh. x. 11), as "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera;" "as the Lord thundered with a great thunder . . . and discomfited the Philistines at Ebenezer (chap. viii. 10), . . . so now the earth quaked at the presence of the Lord who fought for Jonathan." (*Biblical Commentary.*) "**A very great trembling**"—"a trembling of God," **i.e.**, "a supernatural terror infused by God into the Philistines." (*Kiel.*)

Ver. 16. "**The watchmen of Saul looked.**" This shows that the distance between the two encampments was not great. "**The multitude melted away.**" The Hebrew text is here very obscure. *Multitude* may be rendered tumult. Many read "the multitude," or "the tumult, dispersed hither and thither."

Ver. 18. "**Bring hither the ark of God.**" "Many expositors, thinking it extremely improbable that the ark had been removed from Kirjath-jearim, where it was afterwards found by David (2 Sam. vi. 2, 3), regard the Hebrew text as here incorrect, and follow the Septuagint reading of *ephod*. It must, however, be remembered that the Chaldee, the Syriac, the Arabic, and the Vulgate support the authorised version. It has been remarked that if Saul had spoken of the ark he would not have said 'bring hither,' but 'carry forward,' nor would he afterwards have commanded the high priest to 'withdraw his hand.'" (*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*) Dr. Erdmann, Wordsworth, and others, see no reason to doubt the correctness of the Hebrew MSS.

Ver. 19. "**Withdraw thine hand.**" Saul, seeing the battle was growing hotter, resolved to go forward without delay.

Ver. 21. "**The Hebrews.**" These might have been prisoners held by the Philistines. "They are called Hebrews, according to the name which was current among foreigners." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 23. "**Bethaven.**" On the mountains of Benjamin, lying east of Bethel, and between it and Michmash. "According to ver. 31 the Philistines fled *westward* from Michmash to Ajalon. But if we bear in mind that the camp of the Philistines was on the eastern side of Michmash, before Bethaven, according to chap. xiii. 5, and that the Israelites forced their way into it from the south, we shall see that the battle might easily have spread out beyond Bethaven, and that eventually the main body of the enemy might have fled out as far as Ajalon, and have been pursued to that point by the victorious Israelites." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 24. "**Adjured the people.**" He made them take an oath.

Ver. 25. "**Honey upon the ground.**" Eastern countries abound with wild bees, who deposit their combs in the hollows of the trees. "Large combs may be seen hanging on the trees, as you pass along, full of honey." (*Roberts.*) The same thing may be seen in some parts of Europe, especially in Spain.

Ver. 27. "**Jonathan heard not,**" and therefore was not bound by his father's oath; could not be said to have transgressed it. "In the eagerness of pursuit he would not stop to do more than 'put forth the end of the rod.'" (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 31. "**Aijalon, or Ajalon.**" "There is no doubt that the town has been discovered by Dr. Robinson in the modern Yalo, a little to the north of the Jaffa road, and about fourteen miles out of Jerusalem. It stands on the side of a long hill which forms the southern boundary of a fine valley of cornfields which there seems no reason for doubting was the valley which witnessed the defeat of the Canaanites." (*Smith's Biblical Dictionary.*) See also Keil's note on verse 23. "Aijalon would be from fifteen to twenty miles from Michmash." (*Bib. Commentary.*)

Ver. 32. "**With the blood,**" "blood being on the bodies because they were on the ground." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 33. "**Sin against the Lord.**" A breach of the law. Lev. iii. 17, vii. 26, xix. 26, etc. "The prohibition was still older than the law of Moses," Genesis ix. 4. (*Biblical Commentary.*) "They were painfully conscientious in keeping the king's order, for fear of the curse, but had no scruple in transgressing God's command." (*Jamieson*). "**Roll a great stone.**" "By laying the animal's head upon the stone, the blood oozed out on the ground, and sufficient evidence was afforded that the ox or sheep was dead before it was attempted to eat it." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 34. "As everywhere before, so here, the people display unconditional obedience to Saul." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 35. "**And Saul built an altar.**" "*He began to build it,*" *i.e.*, he built this altar at the beginning, or as the first altar. (*Keil.*) "It seems to be implied that though he had reigned three years, and had been enabled by God to gain many victories, yet he had not made any such acknowledgement of gratitude to God for his successes, and that he had ascribed the credit of them to himself." (*Wordsworth.*) "He began to build an altar to the Lord, but did not finish it, in his haste to pursue the Philistines that night, as it follows in verse 36." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 36. "**Let us go down.**" "Saul rushes on in his wild desire of revenge, perhaps incited by the consciousness of having committed a gross folly, and thereby hindered the victory. . . . According to Jonathan's statement (verse 30) the defeat was not total." (*Erdmann.*) "**Then said the priest.**" "Ahiah seems to have been in doubt that Saul's hasty impetuosity was not 'working the righteousness of God,' and with equal courage and faithfulness, worthy of his office as the priest, when every one else yielded to Saul's humour, proposed that they should draw near to God to inquire of Him." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 37. "**Asked counsel.**" By the Urim and Thummim attached to the ephod of the High Priest. (See Judges xviii. 5, 1 Chron. x. 13, Hosea iv. 12, 1 Sam. x. 22.)

Ver. 38. "**Know and see wherein this sin.**" Which Saul infers from God's silence.

Ver. 39. "**For, as the Lord liveth.**" "Saul's rashness becomes more and more apparent." (*Biblical Commentary.*) "**Not a man answered him.**" "The silence of the people is a sign of their conviction that Jonathan had done nothing wrong." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 40. "**Do what seemeth good.**" Another evidence of the people's submission. (See verses 34 and 36.)

Ver. 41. "**A perfect lot.**" *Lot* is not in the original. It should be rendered "Give perfectness, or truth," *i.e.*, *reveal Thy will.* But it is clear from the sequel that Saul did not now inquire of the Lord by the Urim and Thummim, but appealed to the *lot.*

Ver. 42, "**Jonathan was taken.**" "What Jonathan had done was not wrong in itself, but became so simply on account of the oath with which Saul had forbidden it. But Jonathan did not hear the oath, and therefore had not even consciously transgressed. Nevertheless a curse lay upon Israel, which was to be brought to light as a warning to the culprit. Therefore Jehovah had given no reply to Saul. But when the lot, which had the force of a Divine verdict, fell upon Jonathan, sentence of death was not thereby pronounced on him by God, but it was simply made manifest that through his transgression of his father's oath, with which he was not acquainted, guilt had been brought upon Israel. The breach of a command issued with a solemn oath, even when it took place unconsciously, excited the wrath of God, as being a profanation of the Divine name. But such a sin could only rest as guilt upon the man who had committed, or the man who had occasioned it. Now, where the command in question was one of God Himself, there could be no question that, even in the case of unconscious transgression, the sin fell upon the transgressor, and it was necessary that it should either be expiated by him, or forgiven him. But where the command of a man had been unconsciously transgressed, the guilt might also fall upon the man who issued the command, that is to say, if he did it without being authorised or empowered by God. In the present instance Saul had issued the prohibition without Divine authority, and had made it obligatory upon the people by a solemn oath. The people had conscientiously obeyed the command, but Jonathan had transgressed it without being aware of it. For this Saul was about to punish him with death, but the people opposed it. They not only pronounced Jonathan innocent, but they also exclaimed that he had gained the victory for Israel *with God* (ver. 45). In this fact (Jonathan's victory) there was a Divine verdict. And Saul could not fail to recognise now that it was not Jonathan, but he himself who had sinned, and through his arbitrary and despotic command had brought guilt upon Israel, on account of which God had given him no reply." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 45. "**So the people rescued Jonathan.**" "Observe the humiliation to which Saul is reduced by his disobedience and by the consequent withdrawal of Divine grace, and by his rashness and infatuation. The son is raised above the father, and the people above the king." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 46. "**Then Saul went up.**" "Saul desisted from further pursuit of the Philistines, with whose overthrow, so far as it could be effected under the harmful consequences of his blind zeal, he had to be contented. The Philistines went back to their own land. In spite of this serious defeat their strength was not broken (comp. ver. 52). The fact that Saul desisted from pursuit shows that he understood the Lord's silence as a denial, and was obliged to recognise as the cause of it, not Jonathan's conduct, but his own arbitrary and rash procedure." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 47. "So Saul took the kingdom." "As Saul had first of all secured a recognition of himself as king on the part of all the tribes of Israel by his victories over the Ammonites at Jabesh (chap. xi. 12), so it was through the victory which he had gained over the Philistines, and by which these obstinate foes of Israel were driven back into their own land, that he first acquired the kingship over Israel, *i.e.*, first really secured the regal authority over the Israelites . . . . The war against the Ammonites is described in chap. xi.; but with the Philistines Saul had to wage war all the days of his life (ver. 52). The other wars are none of them more fully described, simply because they were of no importance to the kingdom of God." (*Keil.*) Dr. Erdmann takes a different view of these words. He says: "The words do not stand in pragmatical connection with the preceding narrative of the battle against the Philistines, as if the intention was to state that *thus* Saul gained royal authority. His accession to the throne is mentioned merely as starting-point for the historical-statistical statement of the various wars which he carried on from the beginning of his government . . . . What is said of them before and after this is determined by the theocratic point of view, and is designed to show how Saul, in fulfilling his royal calling (essentially a warlike one), came into principal conflict with the theocratic task and significance of the kingdom, and therefore incurred of necessity the judgment of God." "There seems to be something of disapprobation in this expression, as if Saul took it as his own, rather than received it from God." (*Wordsworth.*) **"Zobah."** "This was one of the petty Aramæan kingdoms flourishing at this time (Psa. lx., title). It seems to have been situated between Damascus and the Euphrates. The details given in 2 Sam. viii. 3-8, 12: x. 6-8; 2 Chron. viii. 3, show it to have been a wealthy and powerful tribe, and to have asserted its independence in Solomon's reign." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 49. "Ishui." Abinadab stands for this name in chap. xxxi. 2; 1 Chron. viii. 33: ix. 39. In the passages in Chronicles there is a fourth son mentioned, named Esh-baal, who is doubtless the one called Ish-bosheth in 2 Sam. ii. 8. It is impossible to say why he is not mentioned here.

Ver. 51. This verse should be read: "*And Kish the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner, were the sons of Abiel.*"

Ver. 52. "When Saul saw any strong man," etc. "This remark is probably made in anticipation of David's being taken into Saul's service, xvi. 18, 19; xviii. 2, where the expressions are the same as here." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-16.

JONATHAN'S VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES.

This victory—**I. Reveals the character of Jonathan.** His words and his deeds proclaim him to have been a man of physical courage, and of humble piety. These two elements united in the character of one man make him as perfect a specimen of manhood as it is possible to find. The possession of either characteristic—and especially of the latter—gives to its possessor a claim on our respect. Courage—an absence of fear in the presence of bodily danger—a willingness to expose one's body to risk for the sake of gaining a certain end—is a quality which is not met with in every person, and it deserves to be acknowledged and honoured wherever it is found. But there are many physically brave men who have no godliness: God, in whom they live and move and have their being, is never acknowledged by them, and their deeds of daring are undertaken and accomplished without any thought of seeking His help or rendering to Him thanksgiving for deliverance. And it cannot be denied that there are godly men who are naturally timid in the presence of bodily danger—that, although godliness has a tendency to make a man brave in every sense of the word, it does not so change his natural disposition as to make one who is constitutionally fearful bold and daring in a remarkable degree. But when a courageous man is a man of God—when his deeds of daring are undertaken in dependence upon God, and when he acknowledges Him in all his ways, he is a man in the highest sense of the word, and a consciousness of God's favour increases his natural courage and makes him willing to do and to dare anything in the path of duty. That Saul was a physically brave man we have abundant proof. But he had now been for some time in the field, and had evidently

done nothing. So far as can be gathered from the Scripture record, he had remained inactive since his interview with Samuel. We can but contrast his present hesitation with his decision in relation to the Ammonite invasion, and see in the change which had come over him how departure from God may make a naturally courageous man timid and hesitating. But Jonathan evidently added to his father's natural bravery a spirit of humble dependence upon God, and reminds us of Israel's first warlike leader Joshua, in whom were also united these two noble characteristics. "Let us go over to the Philistines' garrison" speaks for the courage of the warrior-prince, while "It may be that the Lord will work for us" tells of his godly character.

II. Reveals God's approval of His servant's undertaking. This victory of Jonathan's is one among the many instances upon record in the history of God's Church of the special seal of Divine approval which is always set upon eminent faith. Old Testament history gives many illustrations of the truth of the Saviour's words, "*All things are possible to Him that believeth*" (Mark ix. 23), and the success which crowned this undertaking makes it a striking one. It is instructive to notice the increasingly evident marks of Divine approval which were vouchsafed to Jonathan on this occasion. God first condescends to give His servant just enough encouragement to lead him to persevere in his project by accepting the sign which he had proposed. Here was just enough token of God's approval to lead him to go on, but not enough to do away with the exercise of faith. A man of less confidence in God might have faltered here, and have been tempted to regard the Philistines' invitation as only a remarkable coincidence. But Jonathan's faith was strong enough to see in it a token that "the Lord had delivered the enemy into the hand of Israel," and the faith which could discern the Divine approval in an incident apparently so trivial was soon to receive an abundant reward in an unmistakable manifestation of Jehovah's presence in the terror-stricken host, and in the quaking earth. This is the method of Divine working generally. God always looks with approval upon undertakings which are born of confidence in His power and goodness, but although He may, during their progress, vouchsafe sufficient tokens of His power and presence to encourage the hearts of His servants, He may withhold His most decisive and unmistakable manifestations until their courage and faith have been abundantly tested.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 6. Divine power of faith, which makes a man more than men! The question is not what Jonathan can do, but what God can do, whose power is not in the means, but in Himself. O admirable faith in Jonathan, whom neither the steepness of rocks nor the multitude of enemies can dissuade from such an assault!—*Bp. Hall.*

Hope, founded on faith. 1. It is certain,—a matter of faith—that the Lord can save by many or by few. 2. It may be a matter of hope that He will work for us. (People often say: "I have faith that we shall succeed in this enterprise." That is not properly a matter of *faith*, but only of *hope*. We *believe* that God can give success when it is His will; we *are persuaded* that our enterprise is righteous and would have desirable results; therefore we *hope* it may be God's will to give us success).—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—46.

Saul's Rashness.

The whole of Saul's conduct in relation to Jonathan's victory shows us a man acting from passion rather than from principle. Such action in any man must end in mischief, but it is far more mischievous when he holds any position of responsibility and influence—when the destinies of others are largely in his hand. It is a sight which makes one sad to see a noble vessel tossing on a stormy sea with no hand upon the wheel to direct her course, and therefore at the mercy of every wind and wave. Although she is a lifeless object we seem almost to pity her when we reflect that a firm hand upon the rudder would give her all she needs to rise superior to the storm and steer straight to her haven. But how much sadder is the sight of a *gifted man*—one upon whom God has bestowed many opportunities of usefulness and capabilities of using them—throwing them all aside and drifting through life like an unpiloted vessel at the mercy of every wave of passionate impulse, because he will not make the will of God the guide of his life. But if the vessel was not only going to destruction herself but was laden with passengers who would in all probability share her fate, the greatness of the misfortune would be increased a thousand fold. And so it is when a man who does not make his duty the guiding principle of his life holds to a great extent the happiness or misery of his fellow-creatures in his power. Such a man not only wrecks his own life but involves them in distress and perhaps in ruin. Saul here presents us with a sad example of such characters. Instead of riding victoriously over the difficulties which beset the nation at this time, and possibly winning for himself and for them a season of rest from foreign oppression, he drifts towards the rocks himself and involves them in imminent danger because he rejects the hand which would have piloted him in safety. Such a man—

I. Throws away God-given opportunities. Here was an opportunity which, if rightly used, might have entirely subdued the power of the Philistines. The Divine recognition of Jonathan's faith and courage was shown by miraculous signs, which struck them with terror and led to a "very great discomfiture." But the victory could not be followed up because the people were faint from want of food, the consequence of Saul's unreasonably exacting from them a vow to fast until the evening—a vow which had its origin in nothing higher than a spirit of passionate revenge. The opportunity thus lost never returned during the life of Saul, for it is recorded that "there was sore war against the Philistines all his days" (ver. 52).

II. Is always filled with a sense of his own importance. Saul did not come into the field until the rout of the enemy had set in—he only had to follow up the victory which was the fruit of Jonathan's faith and the interposition of God. We should hardly expect to hear a man under such circumstances speaking much about himself and dictating to others as though all the glory of the day was due to his valour. But with Saul there is no word of recognition of the services of his son nor ascription of praise to the God of battles. The work was *his*, and the aim that he had in view was *personal revenge*—"that I may be avenged on mine enemies" (ver. 24). A man who does not give to God the glory due unto Him is always prone to be vain-glorious.

III. Will refuse to acknowledge himself in the wrong, even when his own nature and God Himself declare him to be so. Saul could hardly have been without some natural affection for his noble son, yet he would have seen him die rather than confess that he had acted foolishly and sinfully. If he had

been in a condition of spirit to listen to the voice of God, he might have discerned as plainly as his subjects did that God had been that day with Jonathan, and that the sin which caused Him to vouchsafe no answer to his inquiry was with him and not with his son. But a man under the dominion of his passions is as deaf to the voice of God as he is to that of his own better nature, which is indeed itself a voice of God.

IV. Must be humiliated in the end. Saul's vows and oaths were only like straws in the stream when the people's sense of justice was aroused. If he was blind to all his own interests, and deaf to the voice of reason and of God, they were not. Up to this moment they had yielded to him an unwavering obedience, but now they make a firm stand. Saul may say to Jonathan, "Thou shalt surely die;" but he is met with the united voice of the people, "There shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground." How sad a contrast his position here to that which he held after the Ammonite victory (chap. xi. 12-14). He who would not humble himself before God is now compelled to submit to the decision of his subjects.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 18. Saul is a speciemen of that class of persons who show a certain reverence and zeal for the *outward forms* of religion, and cherish even a superstitious reliance on them, but are not careful to cherish the *inner spirit* of vital religion, without which all outward forms and ordinances, even though instituted by God Himself, are mere "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. xiii. 12).—*Wordsworth.*

Hypocrites in a strait repair to God, not so much to serve Him as to serve themselves upon Him; for at another time they think themselves men good enough, and act as if they were petty gods within themselves.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 19. The neglect of prayer was the beginning of Saul's fall, as all the Fathers interpret that place where it is said that Saul commanded the priest to withdraw his hand from the ark. There are some who with Saul will call for the ark, and will presently cry "Away with it!" that is, will begin their prayers, and will break them off in the midst of any occasion.—*Bp. Andrews.*

Saul will consult the ark: hypocrites, when they have leisure, will perhaps be holy. But when the tumult was aroused Saul's piety decreased. The ark must give place to arms. Worldly minds regard holy duties no further than they stand with their own carnal purposes. Saul, who would before wilfully sacrifice ere he fought (chap. xiii. 9), will now, in the other extreme, fight in a wilful indevotion.—*Bp. Hall.*

The courage of Jonathan had already achieved the victory, while Saul was talking about what was to be done; so much more successful was the faith and obedience of the son, than the worldly policy and formal indifference of the father.—*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 39. Those who are indulgent to their own sins are generally severe in animadverting on the sins of others, and such as most disregard God's authority are most impatient when their own commands appear to be slighted.—*Scott.*

Vers. 24–46. There is here a sixfold testimony against Saul. 1. The word of his own mouth: "Till I have avenged myself on mine enemies. 2. The word of his son: "My father hath troubled the land." 3. The failure of the pursuit of the Philistines. 4. The Lord's silence when He was inquired of. 5. The silence of the people at his oath. 6. The decision of the people, by which God's decision

was made apparent, and Saul's conflict with the Lord and himself shown to be a conflict also with the people, who recognised God's hand and will better than he. On God's side there are not lacking co-working means by which man, when he detaches himself from God, may be brought to consider himself and return to God. And if he do not return, it is because of the energy with which the human will persistently follows its own path, and rejects all God's exhortations and influences.—*Lange's Commentary.*

This narrative allows us to draw some general inferences as to the character of Saul's personal religion at this time. 1. It leads us to perceive how strangely partial his religion was in its operation. The faint and distressed state of the people led them, as soon as they had the opportunity, to eat the animals which they had slain, "in their blood." And Saul immediately took steps to prevent the continuance of this infringement of the ritual. So far, of course, he was right. But the eagerness with which he condemned the sin of the people contrasts strangely with the moral obtuseness which prevented him from seeing that his own folly had been the occasion of their sin. . . . . His religion was of that order which allows its professor to be vastly more affected by something outward and formal, than by the indulgence, within himself, of a wrong and impious state of mind. It puts us in mind of that most thorough manifestation of hypocrisy, when the betrayers of Jesus shrank back with sanctimonious step from the threshold of the judgment-hall, and would not set foot within it, "lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover." And yet although their consciences would not allow them to do this, the very same consciences, when Pilate came out to them and declared that Jesus was innocent, presented no obstacle to their murderous cry, "Crucify Him!" . . . . Oh! strange admixture of care for external proprieties with downright inward guilt! . . . Nothing so blunts the moral sense . . . . as the idea that ceremonial acts independently of holiness of heart constitute real religion; . . . . high-toned morality declines just in proportion as mere ceremonial religion assumes the sway. . . . 2. It does not appear to have been characterised by the slightest self-suspicion. . . . . It never seems to have entered his mind that he could by any possibility have been in the wrong; but he was most ready to suppose that any one else might be to blame. . . . One would have thought that if anything could have brought him to a sense of his error, it would have been the discovery that his rash decree and oath had implicated his own son in liability to suffering and death. Our indignation rises when we hear him say, "God do so and more also," etc. and we are ready to exclaim, "What! another oath? Has not one done mischief enough? Cannot you see it? Do you not feel it?" Nothing can exceed the hardening influence of that professed religion which leaves a man unsuspicious and ignorant of himself. —*Miller.*

CHAPTER XV.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—"Samuel also said to Saul." "This verse is not to be connected chronologically with chap. xii., but continues the narrative of chaps. xiii. and xiv. The solemn reminder of Saul's royal anointing, and of Samuel's Divine mission to that end, refers not to xi. 15, but to ix. 15, x. 1. It points to the fact that the following commission is a *Divine command* communicated by the appointed organ, the prophet of God, and that the bearer of the royal office has here to perform a theocratic mission with unconditional obedience. The *me* stands first (such is the order of the Hebrew) in order to give prominence to the official

authority, as bearer of which Samuel must have felt obliged by Saul's past conduct to assert himself over against him." (*Erdmann.*) "Several years had been passed in unsuccessful military operations against troublesome neighbours, and during these years Saul had been left to act in a great measure at his own discretion as an independent prince. Now a new test is proposed of his possessing the character of a theocratic monarch in Israel; and in announcing the duty required of him, Samuel brought before him his official station as the Lord's vicegerent, and the peculiar obligation under which he was laid to act in that capacity. He had formerly done wrong, for which a severe rebuke and threatening were administered to him. Now an opportunity was afforded him of retrieving that error." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 2. "**I remember.**" Rather, "I have looked upon" (*Keil*), or "I have considered, or noted." (*Erdmann.*) "**Amalek.**" The Amalekites were a wild, warlike, desert-people, dwelling south and south-west of Judea, in Arabia Petrea, descended from the same ancestor as the Edomites, and took their name from Esau's grandson Amalek (Gen. xxxvi. 12-16; 1 Chron. i. 36). God's command goes back to their first hostilities (Exod. xvii.), which were often afterwards repeated in their alliance with the Canaanites (Numb. xiv. 40 s.q.), with the Moabites (Judges iii. 13), and with the Midianites (Judges vii. 12), the Amalekites, according to ver. 33, having newly made an inroad, with robbery and murder, into the Israelitish territory." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 3. "**Utterly destroy.**" Literally, "put everything under the ban." "The ban, of which we have here a notable instance, was an old custom, existing probably before Moses, but formulated, regulated, and extended by him. In its simplest form it was the devotion to God of any object, living or dead. . . . . When an Israelite or the whole congregation wished to devote to God anything—man, beast, or field—whether for the honour of God or to get rid of an injurious or accursed thing, it was brought and offered to the priest, and could not then be redeemed (Lev. xxvii. 28); if living, it must be put to death. A deep consciousness of man's sin and God's holiness underlay this law. The wicked thing, contrary to the spiritual theocratic life of God's people, must be removed, must be committed to him who was ruler and judge of God's people. And so the custom had a breadth of use as well as of meaning which it never had in other ancient nations. . . . . To spare the devoted thing was a grave offence, calling down the vengeance of God. In later times the ban was, doubtless under prophetic direction, softened, and in the New Testament times the infliction of death had quite ceased." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 4. "**Telaim.**" Most likely the same as *Telem* (Josh. xv. 21, 24), a city lying on the eastern border of Judah, and therefore near the territory of the Amalekites. "**Ten thousand men of Judah.**" "This implies that the two hundred thousand were from the other tribes." (*Keil.*) "The separate mention of the men of Judah shows how little union there was between Judah and Ephraim even at this time; a circumstance which throws light upon the whole after history. (See 2 Sam. xi. 11). The presence of these men arose, no doubt, from their tribe being the chief sufferers from the inroads of the Amalekites." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 6. "**Kenites.**" A tribe first mentioned in Gen. xv. 19. "Their origin is hidden from us, but we may fairly infer that they were a branch of the larger nation of Midian, from the fact that Jethro, who in Exod. ii. 15, etc., is represented as priest or prince of Midian, and is in Judges i. 16 : iv. 11, as distinctly said to have been a Kenite. . . They were therefore descended immediately from Abraham by his wife Keturah, and in this relationship and the connection with Moses we find the key to their continued alliance with Israel. The important services rendered by the sheikh of the Kenites to Moses during a time of great pressure and difficulty, were rewarded by a promise of firm friendship between the two nations (Numb. x. 32). And this promise was gratefully remembered long after (1 Sam. xv. 6). The connection then commenced lasted as firmly as a connection could last between a settled people like Israel and one whose tendencies were so nomadic as the Kenites. They seem to have accompanied the Israelites in their wanderings (Num. xxiv. 21, 22, etc.) . . . But these over, they forsook the neighbourhood of the towns and betook themselves to freer air—to 'the wilderness of Judah, which is to the south of Arad' (Judges i. 16), where 'they dwelt among the people' of the district—the Amalekites, who wandered in that dry region, and among whom they were living when Saul made his expedition there." (*Smith's Biblical Dictionary.*)

Ver. 7. "**Havilah—Shur.**" "Havilah, according to Gen. xxv. 18, the boundary of the Ishmaelites, probably therefore in the south-east on the border of Arabia Petrea and Arabia Felix. . . . . Shur is the present wilderness of Jifar, the portion of the Arabian desert bordering on Egypt, into which the Israelites entered after the exodus (Ex. xv. 22). Saul thus smote the Amalekites through their territory from south-east towards the west and north-west." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 8. "**Agag.**" "Evidently a reduplicate variety of the Egyptian Hak (*ruler*). This was the common title of the Amalekite king. Saul spared him probably to enjoy the glory of displaying so distinguished a captive. *Josephus* distinctly asserts that the beauty and tallness of his body made so fine an appearance, and Saul admired it so much, that he thought him

worthy of preservation (cf. 1 Kings xx. 32-34)." (*Jamieson.*) "All the people." "That is, speaking generally, some survived, of course; the Amalekites appear afterwards, xxvii. 8; xxx. 1; 2 Samuel viii. 12. Their complete annihilation is mentioned in 1 Chron. iv. 43." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 9. "Fatlings." Literally *of the second sort. Kimchi* and others understand the word to denote animals of the second birth, which were thought better than others.

Ver. 10. "It repenteth me." "The anthropopathic expression for the change of the Divine procedure into the opposite of what the holy and righteous will of God had determined under the condition of holy and righteous conduct by men when on man's side there has been a change to the opposite of this condition without repentance." (*Erdmann.*) See also comments on this verse. "It grieved Samuel and he cried unto the Lord," etc. Literally "*It burned* (*in*) *him*," *i.e.*, his wrath was kindled. "Many grave thoughts seem to have presented themselves at once to Samuel and disturbed his mind, when he reflected upon the dishonour which might be heaped upon the name of God, and the occasion which the deposition and rejection of Saul would furnish to wicked men for blaspheming God. For Saul had been anointed by the ministry of Samuel, and he had been chosen by God Himself from all the people, and called by Him to the throne. If, therefore, he was nevertheless deposed, it seemed likely that so much would be detracted from the authority of Samuel and the confidence of the people in his teaching, and moreover that the worship of God would be overturned, and the greatest disturbance ensue; in fact, that universal confusion would break in upon the nation. These were probably the grounds upon which Samuel's great indignation rested." (*Calvin.*) "The object of Saul's prayer was doubtless not release from the fulfilment of the Divine command, but the exemption of Saul from the sentence of rejection and the forgiveness of his disobedience." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 12. "When Samuel rose." "It does not appear clearly where Samuel was, but probably at his own home." (*Biblical Commentary.*) "Carmel." A city south-east of Hebron, on the mountains of Judah (Josh. xv. 55), now called Kurmul. "A place." "Rather, a *monument* or *trophy*. The Hebrew word *yad* means *a hand*, but we have a certain clue to the meaning, *monument* or *trophy*, not only in the verb here used, 'set up,' but in 2 Sam. xviii. 18, where we are told that the marble pillar which Absalom set up was called *Yad Absalom*." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 13. "Samuel came to Saul." "In the place (Gilgal) where he had solemnly pledged Saul and the people to unconditional obedience, he now executes judgment for disobedience to the Divine will." (*Erdmann.*) "I have performed," etc. "Self-will and rashness have hitherto been Saul's chief faults. He now seems to add falsehood and hypocrisy." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 15. "The people spared," etc. "The falsehood and hypocrisy of these words lay upon the very surface; for even if the cattle spared were really intended as sacrifices to the Lord, not only the people, but Saul also, would have had their own interests in view (*vid.* ver. 9), since the flesh of thank-offerings was appropriated to sacrificial meals." (*Keil.*) "Every word uttered by Saul seems to indicate the breaking down of his moral character. There is something thoroughly mean in his attempt to shift the responsibility of what was done from his own kingly shoulders to those of the people. One feels that after the scene so forcibly described in this chapter, Saul must have forfeited his own self-respect, and that his downward career was henceforth almost inevitable." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 17. "When thou wast little." "The reference here to Saul's own words (chap. ix. 21), is beyond doubt. It is the humiliating reminder to the haughty Saul of the low position whence he had been elevated to the headship of Israel, and of the modesty and humility which he then possessed." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 18. "Sinners." "As though God would justify his commission to destroy them. So it is said of the men of Sodom, that they were sinners before the Lord." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 19. "Fly upon." "Expressive of eagerness, passionate craving." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 21. "The Lord thy God." "As if he had been showing honour to Samuel, as well as to God, when he was disobeying both." (*Wordsworth.*) "As if he had more zeal for the glory of God than was felt by Samuel." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 22. "Hath the Lord," etc. "This fundamental ethical truth is affirmed, with unmistakable reference to these words of Samuel, in the classical passages Psa. l. 8-14; li. 18, 19; Isa. i. 11; Micah vi. 6-8; Hosea vi. 6; Jer. vi. 20." (*Erdmann.*) "There is a poetical rhythm in the original, which gives it the tone of a Divine oracle uttered by the Spirit of God, imparting to it an awful solemnity, and making it sink deep in the memory of the hearers in all generations." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 23. Literally, "*Rebellion* is the sin of soothsaying, and opposition is heathenism and idolatry."

Ver. 25. "**Pardon my sin.**" "He offers this prayer to *Samuel*, not to *God*." "**Turn again with me.**" "According to ver. 30, to show him honour before the elders of the people, and before Israel, that his rejection might not be known." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 29. "**The strength of Israel.**" A phrase which occurs only here. It means glory, perpetuity, trust. "The Hebrew word, *Netsah*, signifies what is bright or shines continually, and therefore what may be relied upon—as the sun, or stars." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 31. "**So Samuel turned again.**" "Not, of course, to yield to his selfish opposition to God's honour, but to preserve unimpaired in the eyes of the people the position of Saul's kingdom, which, though theocratically rejected, yet still in fact by God's will remained, and especially not to be wanting in the sacrifice of the people." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 32. "**And Agag came unto him delicately.**" The phrase is obscure. The last word is derived from a verb, meaning to live *daintily, softly.* Wordsworth translates, '*joyfully.*' Can it mean fawningly, flatteringly, with a view of appeasing Samuel?" (*Biblical Commentary.*) "**The bitterness of death is passed.**" Some commentators see in these words of Agag a heroic contempt of death, and others an assumed courageousness. Most, however, think that Agag, not having been slain by Saul, felt sure that Samuel would spare his life.

Ver. 33. "**As thy sword,**" etc. "From these words it is very evident that Agag had carried on his wars with great cruelty, and had therefore forfeited his life according to the *lex Talionis.*" (*Keil.*) "**Before the Lord,**" *i.e.*, before the altar of Jehovah there; for the slaying of Agag, being the execution of a ban, was an act performed for the glory of God." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 35. "**And Samuel came no more.**" "The Hebrew is, "saw him no more," *i.e.*, did not visit him, which does not contradict chap. xix. 24.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—8.

The Sentence against Amalek.

I. National sins may bring national retribution long after the individuals who committed the sins have left the world. Both history and revelation teach us that God deals with nations as a whole as well as with men individually, and that the sin of one generation may bring penalty upon another. If a man deals a murderous blow to another and is not brought to justice until long after the crime has been committed, the judge will not overlook the crime because it was not committed yesterday, or a few days or weeks ago—however long the transgressor may go unpunished the penalty of the transgression hangs over him until he has undergone the punishment which it deserves. The words of God in this chapter show that he proceeds on the same principle in relation to nations. Many ages had passed away since "Amalek laid wait for Israel in the way, when he came up out of Egypt," and the men who were guilty of the deed had long since left the earth. Yet the mention of it here shows that the sentence here passed upon the nation had special reference to that national sin which had been committed so long ago. At the same time we must remember that the Amalekites of the time of Saul were possessed by the same spirit of hatred to Israel as their forefathers were—although no reference is here made to their later attacks upon the Hebrew people, we know from other passages (See critical Notes) that the Amalekites now were no less cruel and murderous in disposition than their forefathers in the days of Moses. If a man was brought to the bar of a human judge for a crime committed in his youth, and it was proven that he has since lived for years the life of a peaceable citizen, it might seem hard to make him now suffer for a deed done so long ago, but if during the intervening years he had been adding crime to crime he will deserve to have all his misdeeds taken into account when the day of reckoning comes. So it was with Amalek at this time. The present character of the nation was such

that it fully deserved the sentence here passed upon it even if the ancient sin had not been remembered by God. When our Lord pronounced His terrible woe upon the Jewish nation of His day (Luke xi. 47-52), and foretold that "the blood of all the prophets would be required of that generation," He expressly declares that this terrible retribution would fall upon them because they "allowed the deeds of their fathers,"—in other words, because they were animated by the same spirit and were guilty of the same sins. It was doubtless the same in the case of the Amalekites.

II. The authority from which all national retribution proceeds. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts. . . . now go and smite Amalek." Whoever or whatever may be the instrumental cause of national judgment for national sin, God is the original and first cause. It is He who sets his servants "*over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant* (Jer. i. 10). The executioners of His will may be entirely unconscious that they are carrying out the designs of a Supreme Ruler of the universe in following the devices of their own hearts, but they are doing it as really as if they were knowingly obeying a Divine command. "*Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?*" (Amos iii. 6). When we hear that a monarch or a government has declared war against a nation, we judge of the righteousness or unrighteousness of the act from what we know of the character of the man or the number of men who are responsible for it. If we know them to be men who are lovers of humanity—if we know that they are pre-eminently just and benevolent, and incapable of being actuated by any unworthy motives, we shall conclude that they have strong and sufficient reasons for the step, and that although it must bring much sorrow and suffering, they believe that it will prevent more misery than it occasions. In this light we ought to look at all the wars which were commanded or sanctioned by Divine authority in the early ages of the world. If a human monarch or human government had given such a command as we here find given to Saul, we should be bound to look at the command through what we knew of his character and disposition, and if we knew him to be a man of integrity and benevolence to conclude that he had good ground for taking such a step. We cannot do less when we read such a sentence as that here issued against Amalek. We know that God loves the creatures whom He has made—that He is a God of peace, and that He desires "peace on earth." If the men of the ancient world could rest assured that the Judge of all the earth would and could do nothing but *right* (Gen. xviii. 25), he who possesses the New Testament record ought not to have the shadow of a doubt that all His dealings with men have at all times been actuated by the purest love and the highest wisdom; and that however stern and terrible some of them seem to us, they are in reality dispensations of mercy. In looking at the acts of the most perfect of human kind, we could not be certain of the perfect purity and wisdom of them all; but the same inspired Book which records these acts of retributive justice reveals to us so much of the Divine character as to make it certain that the final verdict of all His creatures will be—"*Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints*" (Rev. xv. 3).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

There are some particular precepts in Scripture given to particular persons, requiring actions which would be immoral and vicious were it not for such precepts. But it is easy to see that all these are of such a kind as that the precept changes the whole nature of the case, and of the actions, and

both constitutes and shows that not to be unjust or immoral which, prior to the precept, must have appeared and really have been so; which may well be, since none of these precepts are contrary to immutable morality. If it were commanded to cultivate the principles, and act from the spirit of treachery, ingratitude, cruelty, the command would not alter the nature of the case or of the action in any of these instances. But it is quite otherwise in precepts which require only the doing an external action: for instance, taking away the property or life of any. For men have no right to either life or property, but what arises solely from the grant of God; when this grant is revoked, they cease to have any right at all in either; and when this revocation is made known, as surely it is possible it may be, it must cease to be unjust to deprive them of either.—*Bp. Butler.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—12.

Samuel's Prayer.

I. There is a strong conviction in the mind of the best men that prayer has an influence upon the Divine mind. This arises, first, from their knowledge of the Divine character and the Divine command. They know that God has commanded His creatures to draw near to Him and pour out their hearts before Him, and they know also that He is infinitely just and good. They therefore conclude that He would not require them to perform any unmeaning act—that if He commands them to pray He is open to influence from their prayers. Secondly, their own past experience and the record of the experience of other praying souls confirms this conviction. If a man has waited upon God in the past and has received into his life the blessings which he has asked of God, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to convince him that there was not a conviction between his prayer and the blessing. And the records of the Church of God in all ages are full of the testimonies of God's servants that they have cried unto the Lord and He has heard them and given them their heart's desire. Samuel was evidently governed by a conviction that prayer was a power with God. His own name was to him a constant testimony of the power of prayer—his whole life had been a life of prayer, and he had in times past received blessings, both for himself and others, in answer to his petitions. In looking back, also, upon the history of Israel in the past, he could recall many times when judgments had been turned aside and blessings had descended in answer to the prayer of the people as a whole or to the request of one man on behalf of the entire nation. He would especially remember how, more than once, the prayer of Moses for rebellious and disobedient Israel had prevailed with God, and his whole soul was penetrated by a conviction that prayer had an influence upon the mind of the Eternal. When, therefore, God made known to him the new offence of which Saul had been guilty, and His purpose concerning him, Samuel did not think it useless to supplicate God long and earnestly to avert the sentence which He had passed on the offender or in some degree to mitigate its severity. The best men in all ages have done the same in similar circumstances under the influence of the same strong conviction of the power of prayer.

II. There are characters for whom the prayers of the best men cannot prevail. The man who begs a physician to restore his friend to health must remember that all does not rest with the physician. If his prescriptions were infallible, there must be co-operation on the part of the patient if they are to be of any avail. If he declines to fall in with the healer's method of cure, he makes his friend's prayer powerless by his own wilfulness. God Himself implies

that Samuel and Moses were most powerful intercessors with Him on behalf of His ancient people (Jer. xv. 1), yet there were times when even their pleadings failed, not because the Divine arm was shortened or the Divine ear deaf to their intercessions, but because the wilfulness of those for whom they prayed rendered it impossible to answer their supplications. God has often broken through the laws of His material universe in answer to the requests of His servants, but the laws of His moral kingdom are unalterable and cannot be broken through. If Saul in his unrepentant condition had been permitted to go unpunished, a moral law would have been broken. Samuel's prayers had done much for him in the past, and if there had been any disposition on his part to turn to God and again submit to His will, they might have even now prevailed for him, but his own persistent obstinacy and self-will made even the petitions of this mighty intercessor with God powerless in his case.

III. When the servants of God become convinced that their prayers cannot be answered, they ought to become fully enlisted on the side of God's purpose although it is not on the side of their desire. Samuel earnestly desired that the purpose of God concerning Saul should not be carried out, and he prayed fervently that his desire might be granted; but when he found that it could not be, although his grief was long and deep (see verse 35 and chap. xvi. 1), he gave himself unreservedly into the hand of God, and prepared himself to carry to Saul the Divine message which he delivered with the authority and faithfulness which befitted his prophetic office. The fervent intercessor is changed into the inflexible judge when he becomes convinced that it is not consistent with the Divine will to grant him his heart's desire. It should be so with God's servants at all times and under all circumstances. They are not forbidden—they are indeed encouraged—to make known their requests unto God with fervour; they may plead with Him with all their heart for the person or the plan that lies near their heart, but when they become convinced that their prayer can not be answered, they ought to cheerfully accept the position, and be willing to lend themselves, heart and soul, to the purpose and plan of God, although it is directly opposed to their previous desires.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 11. *Wilfulness, the sin of Saul.* Saul's temptation and fall consisted in a certain perverseness of mind, founded on some obscure feelings of self-importance, very commonly observable in human nature, and sometimes called pride—a perverseness which shows itself in a reluctance absolutely to relinquish its own independence of action, in cases where dependence is a duty, and which interferes a little, and alters a little, as if with a view of satisfying its own fancied dignity, though it is afraid altogether to oppose itself to the voice of God. Should this seem at first sight to be a trifling fault, it is more worth while to trace its operation in the history of Saul. If a tree is known by its fruit, it is a great sin. . . . . In contemplating the miserable termination of a history which promised well in the beginning, it should be observed how clearly the failure of the Divine purpose is attributable to man. . . . . No one could be selected in talents and conduct more suitable for maintaining political power at home than the reserved, mysterious monarch whom God gave to His people; none more suitable for striking terror into the surrounding nations than a commander gifted with his coolness and promptness in action. But he fell from his election because of unbelief—because he would take another part, and not the very part which was actually assigned him in the decrees of the Most High.—*J. H. Newman.*

"Samuel cried unto the Lord all

night." Was this warrantable? It was a mistaken, but surely not a criminal, urgency; for might he not with reason be supposed to receive the dreadful announcement as a frowning barrier over which faith had to wrestle? . . . . He might not arrest the evil of Saul's fate; the erring monarch must himself be a penitent suppliant ere that can be remedied. He might not keep the crown in the family of Saul; the season of probation was over for that. But he might mitigate the consequences of the sin to Saul and his people. The soul of the king might be brought to repentance and be saved, though with the loss of his dynasty. . . . Who can tell how much Saul was indebted to that prayer of Samuel for the mercies and escapes and successes of his subsequent career.—*Steel.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPHS.—Verses 4-9, *and* 13-23.

SAUL'S SECOND ACT OF DISOBEDIENCE.

I. God will not accept a partial obedience to any of His commands. There is nothing strange or unreasonable in this. If a human ruler gives a command, he will not be satisfied if the person to whom he gives it obeys it just so far as it suits his convenience or agrees with his fancy and no farther. Anything less than a whole obedience is no obedience in the estimation of a fellow-creature. If a soldier receives an order from his general to execute a certain military movement, he is not expected to consult his own wishes or his own judgment, but he must sink his own will entirely in the will of his superior, and fulfil his command to the very letter. However stern may be the work to be done, whatever sacrifice of personal feeling may be involved, anything less than an observance of the commandment in its entirety will be counted as grave a crime as the non-observance of the whole. If a father directs his son to perform a given task, and the son executes about half of that which is required of him, the father will consider that his command has been disobeyed. If this is the case with human superiors, it cannot be expected that the Holy and All-wise God, whose commands—however stern they may sometimes seem—are always perfectly just and good, will be satisfied with less than an entire obedience to His commands. He is surrounded by ten thousand faithful and mighty angelic servants, who render to him a perfect and unquestioning service, and although imperfect and sinful creatures cannot offer to Him a service equal to theirs, yet there are Divine commands which men are able to carry out to the letter, and which they must so carry out if they would not incur the penalty of disobedient servants of the Most High. Such a command was that which was here given to Saul—it was one which he could obey—one for the non-observance of which he could not plead inability—one which he did not attempt to say he was unable to perform. His partial obedience was rejected—his non-observance of all the details of the Divine command was accounted as direct an act of defiance of God's directions as if he had taken no action whatever against the Amalekites. And so God will ever account compliance with His commands, which is measured not by His requirements but by man's inclinations.

II. Where the condition is not fulfilled which is included in the Divine plan of blessing, God repents, not by changing His mind, but by changing His method in relation to the sinner. It is obvious that God cannot undergo a change of disposition or of motive. He is perfect in goodness, and therefore, in all His dealings with His creatures He must always have their welfare in view. He must always be willing to do for them that which is best for their highest interests. It is not possible for the Ruler of the world to act from any of the unworthy motives which sometimes influence men in their conduct towards each other. And being as infinite in wisdom as He is in goodness, He can have

no better plans than His original plans, no second thoughts which are better than His first. When, therefore, God speaks of Himself as *repenting*, He speaks of a change of His dealings with a man, which are the result of a change in that man's attitude towards Himself. Such a change is quite compatible with an unchangeable character and disposition, and is, indeed, the result of it. To men of the same character God's attitude is the same now as it was ages ago, and it will be the same to the end of time, and when a man's relations to God are altered it is in consequence of a change in himself, and not in the unchangeable God. There was no change in God when, in consequence of Saul's non-compliance with the conditions of kingship, God rejected him from being king over Israel. He had been anointed by "the Lord to be captain over His inheritance" (chap. x. 1)—in other words to be His vicegerent in Israel, and when he refused to act in that capacity God proved His own unchangeableness by changing His method of dealing with him. A purpose of blessing on the part of God towards men always includes a condition to be fulfilled on their part, and a purpose of judgment always includes a continuance on the part of the sinner of the conduct which has provoked the judgment. This is the explanation of the repentance of God in relation to the men of the old world, and in relation to the Ninevites. In the first case God sent judgment because the offenders refused to repent, and in the second instance He revoked His sentence of judgment because the men of Nineveh were willing to forsake their sins and return to Him for pardon. (See Gen. vi. 5, 6; Jonah iii. 10).

III. Obedience is better than the offering to God of any other sacrifice. 1. *Because it is a sacrifice of far higher value.* Obedience is the giving up of the will to the will of another—it is therefore the sacrifice of the whole man. When a man has given himself thus to God, he has offered to Him all that he has to offer—all his powers of soul and body as well as all his material possessions. This was the sacrifice which Adam offered to his Maker before he sinned, and this is the offering which has been for ages offered to God by His sons who have never at any time resisted His will. This is far more precious, and therefore far more acceptable to the Lord, than "*thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil*" (Micah vi. 7), because it is a spiritual and moral sacrifice. 2. *It is a sacrifice which can be offered at any time and in any place.* The sacrifices of the Levitical law were required to be offered in certain places. A man who desired to sacrifice to the Lord could only do so by coming up to the place appointed, and hence his offerings could only be made at intervals. But obedience is a sacrifice which can always be rendered to God—an expression of love to Him which can be made everywhere and always. 3. *It is a sacrifice which every man can offer for himself.* Even in Israel there might have been men at times too poor to be able to bring the least costly material offering to the altar of the Lord; but none is ever too poor to offer his will to God—to give himself up to His guidance and submit to His commands. And this is a sacrifice in which there is no need of the intervention of a third person—an offering in which every man can be his own priest. 4. *It is the sacrifice which alone can make any other sacrifice acceptable.* All other offerings without this are "vain oblations," and even "an abomination" (Isa. i. 13) unto Him who owns "every beast of the forest and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Psalm l. 10). To expect a Holy and Spiritual Being to be willing to accept anything less than the offering of the heart, is to expect Him to be satisfied with less than would often content a fellow-creature. Many a man would spurn a gift which was not an outcome of inward feeling, and yet God's creatures sometimes act as if they thought their Maker could be bribed by such an offering.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 6. Thus does every good thing reward itself; nothing remains forgotten; often in later centuries the seed sown in an old past yet everywhere comes up gloriously, and children and children's children derive advantage from the good done by their fathers.—*Schlier.*

He that is not less in mercy than in justice, as he challenged Amalek's sin of their succeeding generations so he derives the recompense of Jethro's kindness unto his far descended issue. . . . If we sow good works, succession shall reap them, and we shall be happy in making them so. . . . It is the manner of God, first to separate before He judge, as a good husbandman weeds his corn ere it be ripe for the sickle, and goes to the fan ere he goes to the fire . . . . Why should we not imitate God, and separate ourselves, that we may not be judged; separate not one Kenite from another, but every Kenite from among the Amalekites, else if we will needs live with Amalek we cannot think much to die with him.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 13. Here is a proof that a man may be blinded by his own self-will, and that he may imagine that his own way is right, while it is leading him to the gates of death.—*Wordsworth.*

Could Saul think that Samuel knew of the asses that were lost, and did not know of the oxen and sheep that were spared? . . . . Much less, when we have to do with God Himself, should dissimulation presume either of safety or of secresy. Can the God that made the heart not know it? Can He that comprehends all things be shut out of our close corners? Saul was otherwise crafty enough, yet herein his simplicity is palpable. Sin can besot even the wisest man; and there was never but folly in wickedness . . . No man brags so much of holiness as he who wants it. True obedience is joined ever with humility and fear of unknown errors. Falsehood is bold, and can say, "I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord."—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 14. Let us aim after such a walk and conversation as that we can be natural in our demeanour, and not artificial and forced; such a life as will bear inspection behind the scenes, and as will not compel those who watch for souls to ask, as they look around, *What meaneth this or that?* . . . and while asking the question to feel the sad truth of the matter to be, that the thing which calls forth the question is in our own case, as it was in Saul's, only so much spared of that which God has commanded us to subdue and destroy, so much permitted to live which God had required us to conquer and to slay.—*Miller.*

Ver. 16. We must not look to what hypocrites say of themselves, but to what God's word says of them.—*S. Schmid.*

Ver. 17. Observe the contrast between Saul and Paul. Saul of Gibeah lost an earthly kingdom by pride, but Saul of Tarsus gained a heavenly kingdom by humility (1 Cor. xv. 10).—*Wordsworth.*

There is an ingratitude in every sin, and that is to be considered. Good turns aggravate unkindness, and our offences are increased by our obligations.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 20. Men are apt to cry out with Saul, "I have obeyed the commandment of the Lord; but, alas, when it comes to be examined, how have they obeyed Him? . . . Possibly they have, with Saul, destroyed the Amalekites; have constantly and openly opposed the declared enemies of religion. Moreover, perhaps, whatever *was vile and refuse* that they have destroyed utterly. Whatever sins did not easily beset them, nor offer them strong temptations, these sins they have both heartily avoided themselves, and severely condemned in other men. *But the best of the sheep and of the oxen,* the things which were dear to them, like a right hand or a right eye, these they could not

spare. . . . . And yet, as Saul endeavoured to transfer the blame upon the people, so, in the other case also, it is not the men themselves, it is not their reason and judgment, that chooses the sin, but their inferior appetites, their passions and affections choose it for them, and drive them into it, even perhaps in a manner against their wills.—*Dr. S. Clark.*

Vers. 22, 23. It was as much as to say that the sum and substance of Divine worship consisted in obedience, with which it should always begin, and that sacrifices were, so to speak, simple appendices, the force and worth of which were not so great as obedience to the precepts of God.—*Calvin.*

All conscious disobedience is actually idolatry, because it makes self-will, the human I, into a God. So that all manifest opposition to the word and commandment of God is, like idolatry, a rejection of the true God.—*Keil.*

This saying of Samuel came literally true in Saul's case. Through disobedience he was forsaken of God, and became a prey to the Evil Spirit, and was led on in time to resort to witchcraft (chap. xxvii. 7), and perhaps to consult *seraphim* (see chap. xix. 13). Here is a solemn warning for these latter days.—*Wordsworth.*

When the Lord expressly says "Thou shalt," and His rational creature dares to persist in saying "I will not," whether the contest be about an apple or a kingdom, it is stubbornness and rebellion. —*Scott.*

May we then take good care that, even when we mean to render the Lord service or obedience, we yet beware of our choice and fancy, and follow only the traces of the Divine will. Obedience is the mother-grace, the parent of all virtues. It makes the eye see, the ear hear, the heart think, the memory remember, the mouth speak, the foot go, the hand work, and the whole man do that, yea that alone, which is conformed to the will of God. . . It is impossible for him who is not obedient to God to lay any command upon men. That is what these words ("The Lord hath rejected thee,") and the aim of God therein mean. The authorities must not proceed from their own will and notion, but in everything must take God's word and will for their rule. If He does not drive apostate rulers from their position, like as He did Nebuchadnezzar, but leaves them ruling, as He also did Saul for a while, yet they are and remain rejected in His sight, and vainly write themselves "by the grace of God," when He Himself does not so acknowledge them.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

God rejects Saul from being king over Israel who had rejected God from being King over Saul.—*T. Adams.*

Every ceremonial law is moral; the outward act is never enjoined but for the sake of the inward thing, what it pictures—represents. Never is there body without spirit. But the fleshly sense would have none of the spirit, and laid hold solely of the body, which, thus isolated, became a corpse.—*Hengstenberg.*

It is a holier and a better thing to do one's duty, than to make duties for one's self and then set about them.—*Spurgeon.*

Why was sacrifice good, but because it was commanded? What difference was there betwixt slaughter and sacrifice but obedience?—*Bp. Hall.*

Saul lived to give in his own person the painful but the clearest evidence of the identity, as far as concerns a common origin and principle of action, which may exist between two very different crimes. . . The same disposition which evinced itself in those acts of rebellion, which he committed all the while he was crying down witchcraft, induced him to do the very thing which he censured when occasion pressed . . . The security against our being guilty of any particular form of transgression is not that we condemn it, but that the evil principle within us which excites to its commission, is subdued and removed by Divine grace.—*Miller.*

Vers. 4–23. The fall of King Saul shows: (1) How unrepented and only

whitewashed sin at the first severe temptation breaks out as manifest and criminal self-seeking. (2) How this self-seeking is so blinding as to tell itself and others the lie that it is a labour for the Lord.—*J. Disselhoff.*

We may see in the history of Saul how important it is that we should make the most of the opportunities which God sets before us. There came to the son of Kish a tidal time of favour, which, if he had only recognised and improved it might have carried him, not only to greatness, but to goodness. But he proved faithless to the trust committed to him, and became in the end a worse man than he would have been if no such privileges had been conferred upon him. . . . His career is a melancholy illustration of the truth of the Saviour's words: "From him that hath not, shall be taken away even that he hath."—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24—35.

Saul's Confession.

I. Saul's confession of sin was satisfactory as to word. "I have sinned," is the acknowledgement of responsibility and accountability. "I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord," is an acknowledgment on the part of man that there is a Being who has a right to lay down laws for the guidance of His creatures. There are men in the world who deny that there is such a thing as sin—who affirm that they are creatures of necessity, and are therefore undeserving of blame for any action. But Saul here admits his personal responsibility, and allows that his negative sin—his non-observance of a plain command—was a positive transgression. True it is that he admits this with reluctance, and that he involves the people in the act of disobedience. But whether he speaks the truth or not in relation to them, he does not now attempt to palliate his sin by laying the blame directly on them. He acknowledges his own personal guilt in the same words as David used to express his deep and heartfelt repentance, and as the prodigal uttered when he came first to himself and then to his father's home. So far as the language of the confession goes it leaves nothing to be desired.

II. It is possible to use words which express true repentance and yet lack the spirit of it. A dead body is complete so far as the form goes, no limb is wanting, and all the beauty of the most perfect symmetry of form may be there. But it is only a corpse notwithstanding, and because the living spirit is wanting even the form will vanish after a time. So a man may use a "form of sound words" (2 Tim. i. 13) which in language may leave nothing to be desired. He may acknowledge that he is a sinner, and that he merits punishment, and his language may be that of general humility, and yet the spirit of true repentance may be absent. But the wear and tear of human life will soon make apparent whether the outward form is inhabited by a living soul or whether it is only a lifeless body. If it is a true repentance the actions proper to it will follow, but if it is not, the very form will cease to exist, and the man who once had the form of repentance without the power will cease even to possess the form, and become more and more subject to the law of sin and death. Even Pharaoh said, "I have sinned" (Exod. ix. 27), but in his mouth the words were not the outcome of a sense of sin, and he soon became too hardened even for such a formal confession. So was it with Saul. We here see him preserving some outward form of godliness although he was "denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. iii. 5), and later on in his life he repeats this confession (chap. xxvi. 21), but as on neither occasions it was dictated by the spirit of true and godly sorrow for sin, there came a time in his life when even the formal confession vanished from his lips. The words of repentance were not wanting, but there

was no correspondence between the language and the deeds—it was left to another to carry into effect the Divine commandment which Saul here confesses he had transgressed, but which it does not appear that he now made any attempt to obey. It was left to Samuel to do the work of Saul, and thus to prove that there was one man in Israel who would carry out to the letter the bidding of Jehovah.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Beware of a Saul's confession. That you may do this, it is necessary to know two things. 1. What a Saul's confession *is*. 2. What a Saul's confession *works*.—*J. Disselhoff.*

He confesseth not till the sin be wrung from his mouth; he seeks his peace out of himself, and relies more upon another's virtue than upon his own penitence; he would cloak his guiltiness with the holiness of another's presence; he is more tormented with the danger and damage of the sin than with the offence; he cares to hold in with men, in what terms soever he stands with God.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 29. The heathen saw God as a passionate, capricious, changeable Being, who could be angered and appeased by men. The Jewish prophets saw Him as a God whose ways were equal, who was unchangeable, whose decrees were perpetual, who was not to be bought off by sacrifice, but by righteous dealing, and who would remove the punishment when the causes which brought it on were taken away. In their own words, when men repented, God would repent. . . . . A boat rows against the stream, the current punishes it. . . . . The boat turns and goes with the stream, the current assists it. . . . . But the current is the same, it has not changed—only the boat has changed its relationship to the current. Neither does God change. We change, and the same law which executed itself in punishment now expresses itself in reward.—*Brooke.*

Ver. 30. If Saul had been really penitent, he would have prayed to be humbled rather than to be honoured. —*St. Gregory.*

Many men pass (*i.e.*, *care*) so little for their consciences, yet stand so much upon their credit. As Saul, who using no diligence to regain the favour of God, was yet very solicitous that his honour might be preserved in the opinion of the people.—*Bp. Sanderson.*

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**How long wilt thou mourn," etc.** "These words show that the prophet had not yet been able to reconcile himself to the hidden ways of the Lord; that he was still afraid that the people and kingdom of God would suffer from the rejection of Saul, and that he continued to mourn for Saul, not merely from his own personal attachment to the fallen king, but also, and perhaps still more, from anxiety for the welfare of Israel." (*Keil*). "**Thine horn.**" "A different word from the *vial* spoken of at chap. x. 1." (*Biblical Commentary.*) "Horns were anciently used for holding liquors, which were sometimes drunk out of them. They were hung up on the walls of rooms or the poles of tents." (*Jamieson.*) "**Jesse the Bethlehemite.**" "The genealogy of Jesse is traced to Boaz (Ruth iv. 18-21). But the object was merely to prove that he was a link in the Messianic chain of descent, and it is left quite unknown whether Jesse was the eldest of Obed and Boaz's family, or a younger son." (*Jamieson.*) "**I have provided.**" "The language is remarkable and seems to imply a difference between this and the former king. Saul was the people's choice, ... the next was to be of God's nomination." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 2. "**How can I go,**" etc. "The sacred historian does not conceal the fact that Samuel was afraid . . . . here is an evidence of veracity." *(Wordsworth.)* "This fear on the part of the prophet, who did not generally show himself either hesitating or timid, can only be explained, as we may see from ver. 14, on the supposition that Saul was already given up to the power of the evil spirit, so that the very worst might be dreaded from his madness if he discovered that Samuel had anointed another king. That there was some foundation for Samuel's anxiety, we may infer from the fact that the Lord did not blame him for his fear, but pointed out the way by which he might anoint David without attracting attention." *(Keil.)* **Say, I am come to sacrifice,**" etc. "There is here an appearance of duplicity sanctioned by Divine authority which it is important for us to examine. It was the purpose of God that David should be anointed at this time as Saul's successor, and as the ancestor and type of His Christ. It was not the purpose of God that Samuel should stir up a civil war by setting up David as Saul's rival. *Secrecy*, therefore, was a necessary part of the transaction. But *secrecy* and *concealment* are not the same as *duplicity* and *falsehood*. Concealment of a good purpose for a good purpose is clearly justifiable, *e.g.* in war, in medical treatment, in State policy, and in the ordinary affairs of life. In the providential government of the world, and in God's dealings with individuals, concealment of His purpose till the proper time for its development is the rule rather than the exception, and must be so." *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 4. "**The elders trembled,**" etc. "The anxious inquiry of the elders presupposes that even in the time of Saul the prophet Samuel was frequently in the habit of coming unexpectedly to one place and another, for the purpose of reproving and punishing wrong-doing and sin." *(Keil.)* "They might have been conscious of secret guilt, and supposed that Samuel coming among them as the judicial vicegerent of God, was about to investigate and punish the commission of some crime. The inhabitants of this place have long been proverbial for their refractory spirit; for even in modern times they have been often at variance with the reigning power." *(Hardy's Notices of the Holy Land.)*

Ver. 5. "**I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord.**" "It is evident from this that the prophet was accustomed to turn his visits to account by offering sacrifices, and so building up the people in fellowship with the Lord." *(Keil.)* "**Sanctify yourselves.**" By the preparation prescribed in Exod. xix. 14, 15. "**He sanctified Jesse,**" etc., *i.e.*, he took care that they were sanctified.

Ver. 7. "**The Lord said.**" "In like manner the Lord in the days of His flesh read and answered men's thoughts." Compare Matt. xii. 25, Luke v. 22, etc. *(Biblical Commentary.)* "**Outward appearance.**" Literally the *eyes*. "The eyes, as contrasted with the heart, are figuratively employed to denote the outward form." *(Keil).*

Ver. 9. "**Shammah**" The name is written Shimeah, 2 Sam. xiii. 3; and Shimma, 1 Chron. ii. 13, xx. 7. The proper orthography is probably that in 2 Sam. xiii. 3. He was the third son of Jesse, and father of Jonadab "a very subtil man, Ammon's friend," 2 Sam. xiii. 3, and of Jonathan who slew a giant of Gath, 1 Chron. xx. 6, 7. *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 10. "**Seven,**" *i.e.* including the three who had already passed. It appears from this, and from chap. xvii. 12, that Jesse had eight sons; but in 1 Chron. ii. 13-15, only seven are ascribed to him." *(Biblical Commentary).* "**Samuel said to Jesse.**" "It is not till this verse that the words 'to Jesse' are added, expressly indicating an address of Samuel *to him*. It does not, however, follow from these words, that Samuel made Jesse a sharer of the divine secret . . That address to Jesse is merely a negative declaration that the divine selection, with which Samuel was concerned, and which in the absence of express intimation of its nature might refer to the prophetic office, rested on none of these seven sons." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 11. "**Sit down;**" literally, *turn round*, or *surround*, *i.e.*, not sit at the table. "The ancient Hebrews sat round a low table with their legs crossed, as the modern Orientals do, for the luxurious practice of reclining was not introduced into Judea until a late period of Old Testament history." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 12. "**Ruddy,**" red, or auburn-haired. This was regarded as a mark of beauty in a country where the hair was generally black. Josephus refers the expression to his tawny complexion.

Ver. 13. "**Then Samuel took the horn of oil,**" etc. "There is nothing recorded concerning any words of Samuel to David at the time of the anointing, and in explanation of its meaning, as in the case of Saul (chap. x. i). In all probability Samuel said nothing at the time, since, according to ver. 2, he had good reason for keeping the matter secret, not only on his own account, but also for David's sake; so that even the brethren of David, who were present, knew nothing about the meaning and object of the anointing, but may have imagined that Samuel merely intended to consecrate David as a pupil of the prophet's. At the same time we can hardly suppose that Samuel left Jesse, and even David, in uncertainty as to the object of his

mission, and of the anointing which he had performed. He may have communicated all this to both of them without letting the other sons know." *(Keil.)* "**And the Spirit of the Lord came upon David.**" "The youth entered upon a new stage in the development of his inner life which was wholly consecrated to God. The rich talents wherewith he was endowed from his birth received on all sides fresh unfolding. The law, the holy records of the books of Moses, in which he had been instructed from his earliest years, opened themselves to his enlightened eyes more and more. The peaceful stillness of nature amid which, tending his father's flocks, he spent his days, and often, also, the mild, starry nights, favoured his penetration into the secrets of the Divine revelation. His heart, moved and directed from above, already poured itself out in sacred song and poem, which he sang to the accompaniment of his harp, to the praise of that God before whom, from his childhood, he had learned to bow the knee; and it may well be assumed that even then, amid that rural loneliness, psalms streamed forth from his heart, such as the eighth, which overflows with adoring wonder at the condescension and grace with which the glorious Creator of heaven and earth has concerned Himself with frail man." *(Krummacher.)*

Ver. 14. "**An evil spirit from the Lord.**" "This spirit is, according to the narrative, not the condition itself of gloomy melancholy and torturing anguish, but an objective power which produced it. It is a wicked spiritual power, which came upon him as the opposite of the good holy spirit which he once possessed, and goaded him to rage and madness, finding its occasion in the conflict within his soul, and in the passionateness of his nature, which, after the spirit of the Lord left him, was unbridled. It came on Saul *from the Lord;* that is, the Lord gave him over to the power and might of this spirit as punishment for his disobedience and defiant self-will." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 18. "**A mighty valiant man,**" etc. David's reputation for courage, etc., was already very great. Doubtless since the Spirit of the Lord came upon him his natural qualities and powers had been greatly enhanced. His feat of killing the lion and the bear (chap. xvii. 34, 36) had been performed, like Sampson's feats of strength, under the same supernatural influence, and was probably more or less known." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 20. "**An Ass,**" etc. The Hebrew is *an ass of bread. Reland* adduces a great number of quotations from Greek writers, showing that the ancients used a bottle with two long handles, which, from their resemblance to asses' ears, were called (ὄνοι) asses; and the Greek poet *Sosibus* says of one of his heroes, "He ate three times in the space of a single day three great asses of bread, which *Casaubon* understood to signify the *lading of three asses*, whereas the true meaning is the contents of three vases or jars called asses." *(Jamieson.)* "These presents show how simple were the customs of Israel, and in the court of Saul at that time." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 21. "**His Armour-bearer.**" "This choice, being an expression of the king's partiality shows how honourable the office was held to be." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 23. "**Harp.**" "The *kuinor*, not the large heavy instrument denoted by the word *harp* amongst us, but the *lyre*, a light, portable instrument resembling a bow in shape" (*Jamieson*). "**Saul was refreshed,**" etc. "Bochard has collected many passages from profane writers, which speak of the medicinal effects of music on the mind and body, especially as appeasing anger, and soothing and pacifying a troubled spirit." (*Biblical Dictionary.*) "Did the music banish the demon? Not so, but the higher frame of mind into which the king was brought by it sufficed to limit at least the sphere of the operation of the evil spirit within him . . . Besides, the silent intercessions which David sent up to heaven on the wings of the music of his harp must have contributed not a little to the results with which his melodies were crowned" (*Krummacher*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—5.

Samuel's Visit to Bethlehem.

I. God helps man to a better condition by the instrumentality of man. Those parts of the earth that are by nature useless to man, may by cultivation be made to minister to his comfort. Weeds and unfruitful trees may be uprooted, and trees yielding fruit and herbs for the service of man may take their place. But man himself must work the change. If the desert is to rejoice and blossom as the rose, human instrumentality must exert itself. And so is it in matters relating to man's spiritual and moral well-being. If a moral wilderness is to be transformed into a garden of the Lord, God uses men, or a man, to do the work. Israel was now suffering from the misrule of a king who would not be ruled by God, and God purposed to bring about a change, to inaugurate a new and brighter

era for the people, both materially and spiritually. And He chose a man to indicate His rejection of the king who had brought no blessing to the nation, and to point out him who was to lift it to a higher condition of prosperity both morally and commercially. Samuel, in the hand of God, was the man who uprooted the fruitless tree and planted in its place one which was to bear fruit for Israel's sustenance and growth. So the higher and more blessed rule of the gospel dispensation was proclaimed to humanity by man. The state of man by nature is a state of moral misrule—of spiritual unfruitfulness; and to man was entrusted the work of proclaiming to the world deliverance from the dominion of the powers of darkness and the advent of a new King of men, under whose beneficent rule first the wilderness of individual hearts, and then by degrees all the moral wastes upon the face of the earth shall break forth into spiritual fruitfulness and beauty. When Our Lord commissioned His Apostles to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15), He commanded them to proclaim the accession of a new Sovereign, under whose government all the subjects of all the kingdoms of the world might, if they were willing, be lifted into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He has ordained that by human lips this new era shall be made known to man—that by human instrumentality men shall learn who it is that is God's Anointed One.

II. Those who are instruments of good to man sometimes shrink from the work which God calls them to do. And Samuel said, "How can I go?" God's methods of making His children instruments of good to others are often most perplexing and painful to them, and tasks are given them to perform from which they draw back in fear and trembling. Joseph was made an instrument of great blessing both to the nation of Egypt and to his own family, but the way in which he became such a benefactor was a very rough one, and if he could have seen it lying before him without seeing the goal to which it would bring him, he would probably have asked Samuel's question, "How can I go?" When Moses was called by God to go and stand before Pharaoh, he drew back from the mission with which God charged him with such persistency that "the anger of the Lord was kindled against him" (Exod. iv. 13), although in his case the reluctance apparently arose rather from a sense of his own inability than from fear of evil to his own person. Yet in his case as in that of Samuel the cause of the shrinking back was the same, viz., a momentary failure of that full confidence in God which was an eminent feature in the characters of both these good men. The hesitation in both was but a transient cloud which only dimmed for a very short season the almost perfect obedience which each of them rendered to their God. It sufficed to show that both were men of like passions and infirmities with ourselves, and links them with God's honoured servants in all ages, all of whom have their hours of faithlessness and consequently of fear.

III. The true servants of God in such circumstances tell out their perplexity and fear to God Himself. This is a certain cure for attacks of cowardice arising from mistrust of God's power and wisdom. When Jonah was entrusted with a distasteful and perilous task there is no record that he made known to God his weakness and fear. He took counsel with no one but himself, and the result was ignominious defeat. But neither Moses nor Samuel seek, like the son of Amittai, to "flee from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah i. 3), but to the Lord Himself they make known their fears and their reasons for wavering. And the result in both cases is the same—their faith rises to the emergency, and in the protection and help afforded to them in performing the duty enjoined upon them they have a fresh proof that God never sends His servants to "warfare at their own charges."

IV. Those who are instruments of good to their fellow-creatures are often regarded by them with distrust and suspicion. No man in the land of Israel could have had any reason to regard Samuel in any other light than in that of a true friend, yet the elders of the town meet him with the question, "Comest thou peaceably?" A consciousness of guilt is often at the bottom of this distrust and dislike. The entrance of a faithful man of God into some circles or localities is unwelcome because his very presence arouses in the ungodly a sense of their guilt. The feeling may not be very clearly defined even to themselves, but it is the cause which makes them dislike the company of such a man. The officer of justice, whether he be clothed in a policeman's uniform or a judge's ermine, is regarded by an innocent man as a "minister of God for good" (Rom. xiii. 4). But the guilty man does not feel at rest in his presence. Samuel was a man of God whose very presence was enough to arouse in guilty men a sense of their deserts, and he was also a judge in Israel whose visit to Bethlehem might have been regarded with fear by the villagers, because they knew that they had been guilty of outward acts of disobedience to the law of God. Or their distrustful reception of Samuel might have arisen from a suspicion that he was to be the instrument of a change of rule in Israel. Men are often so little alive to their true interests, and so averse to any change, that they resent any disturbance in the existing order of things, even although it would bring much blessing to themselves. The Bethlehemites might have been certain that any change which came to them from God through Samuel would be for good, and not for evil, and yet fear of Saul and an unwillingness to be disturbed might have made them prefer the rule of their present unworthy monarch to a new order of government. A fear of immediate unpleasant consequences and a cowardly and unworthy content with things as they are has often made men regard with suspicion and with positive hatred those who have desired to bring them under a better rule—those who have endeavoured to free them individually from the tyranny of Satan, or, nationally from bondage to Satan's emissaries. The reformers of all ages, both in the Church and in the State, have been coldly welcomed by the majority of those to whom God has made them instruments of blessing. But this need not be a matter of either surprise or discouragement when we remember that those whom the Son of God came to make "free indeed" (John viii. 36) cried, "*Crucify Him! crucify Him!*" and that His great apostle whose heart's desire and prayer was for the salvation of his fellow-countrymen (Rom. x. 1) received from them this sentence, "*Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that He should live*" (Acts xxii. 22).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. It is an unnatural senselessness not to be affected with the dangers, with the sins, of our governors. God did not blame this sorrow, but moderated it. It was not the affection He forbade but the measure. In this is the difference betwixt good men and evil; that evil men mourn not for their own sins, good men do so mourn for the sins of others that they will hardly be taken off. If Samuel mourn because Saul hath cast away God by his sin he must cease to mourn because God hath cast away Saul from reigning over Israel in His just punishment. A good heart hath learned to rest itself upon the justice of God's decree, and forgets all earthly respects when it looks up to heaven.—*Bp. Hall.*

The affairs of the kingdom of God go their way without break or halt according to God's high thoughts and decrees, though human sin and its attendant judgment (as in Saul's case), or human weakness (as in Samuel's inordinate grief for Saul), may seem

to hinder the plans of the Divine wisdom. But it is also precisely by human sin and foolishness that the history of God's kingdom under the guidance of the Divine wisdom and providence receives new occasions and impulses to wider and higher development according to the aims which God sets before Himself.—*Lange's Commentary.*

God demands in the souls He sets apart for Himself and for the guidance of others, such a dying to all things that He does not allow them to regard any other interest than His, whatever reason may be alleged.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

Remedies for improper mourning. 1. Submission to the will of God ("I have rejected him"). 2. Diligence in present work for God ("Fill thy horn and go"). 3. Hope that God will bring a better future ("I have provided me a king")—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

In the providence of God, there is a blessed arrangement by which the new duties and cares which are occasioned by bereavements, losses, or disappointments become the means of alleviating distress and improving the soul . . . . Persons in public positions are summoned from their humiliation and melancholy, induced by the defeat of favourite schemes, to endeavour to retrieve their influence, and do some good before they die. The sense of personal and relative responsibility is thus made by God to rebuke and cure a sorrow deemed inconsolable . . . . **1.** *There is a duty to the Lord* . . . . It would not be reverent to quarrel with His providence: it would be disobedient and impious . . . **2.** *There is a duty to your own soul.* "Fill thine horn with oil," and go to the new duties to which you are called, that it may be well with yourself. **3.** *There is a duty to others.* Samuel had something more to live for than his own interest. His grief was a public calamity. The sorrow into which he was plunged might do injury . . . . When there are others to care for, our grief must not be immoderate.—*Steel.*

Ver. 2. Perhaps desire of full direction drew from him this question, but not without a mixture of diffidence; for the manner of doing it doth not so much trouble him as the success. It is not to be expected that the most faithful hearts should be always in an equal height of resolution: God does not chide Samuel, but instruct him.—*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 4. Hundreds of years after this, when the heavenly light was seen in the same place by the shepherds, they too were "sore afraid;" but there was as little to fear in the one case as in the other; for in both there was a provided sacrifice, and in both the mission was one of peace; yea, as Samuel came to anoint David to be a king, so the angel-heralded Jesus appeared "to make us kings and priests unto our Lord and His Father."—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—12.

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID.

I. There is a tendency in even the best men to be carried away by appearances. Because Eliab's countenance was comely and his stature imposing, Samuel said at once, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before me." Yet he knew nothing of Eliab's inner man, and he knew from the sad example of Saul that external beauty was no guarantee of internal worth. The estimate that men form of human character must always be grounded on outward manifestations, just as the physician forms his estimate of the state of a man's health from the symptoms which present themselves to his observation. They cannot

do as God can—penetrate into the hidden recesses of both soul and body, and read there as in a book the exact condition of the physical and moral nature. Man should therefore be very careful in pronouncing a judgment or forming an opinion concerning his fellow-man, remembering the "Lord seeth not as man seeth; he should not be hasty to decide, but should wait until the character has had time to develop itself—until long experience and observation have in some measure qualified him to be a judge in the matter. To argue that because a man possesses gifts of person or of intellect he is also the possessor of moral worth, is more foolish than to argue that a man is wealthy because he is dressed in gay clothing, and yet everyone of us is prone to be influenced more than we ought to be by outward appearance, and to form our judgments of those we meet upon very insufficient grounds. Even this prophet of God was not free from this weakness.

II. However men may err in their estimate of men, God's estimate will decide who is to come uppermost. No member of Jesse's household thought it worth while to call the shepherd-boy in to partake of the sacrificial feast, or to bring him under the notice of the man of God; but the feast notwithstanding had to be delayed until his arrival, and it was concerning him that Samuel heard the Divine voice, saying, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." There is always a levelling force at work in the universe, which only needs time to place each man where he ought to be—lifting up this one and putting down the other—making the last first and the first last according to the moral worth of each. This levelling force is the hand of God, who will see to it that no true man of worth shall lack position and opportunity to let the light that is in him shine forth to the glory of God, and the good of his fellow-creatures. God's election and approval is not always so perceptible to the eye of man as it was in the case of Jesse's youngest son, but it is always as real and as certain. Some men do not reach their destined throne among their fellows until they have left the world; they must pass away from earth before men can realise that a king has been among them. It may be that many who have lived and died in obscurity are yet awaiting their coronation day, or they may have been elected to high and honourable service in another world. However this may be there is a deeply-rooted conviction in all who confide in the righteousness of the Judge of all the earth, that no moral king shall miss his throne. Appearances may be strongly against it, but appearances were likewise strongly against the fact that the despised and crucified Nazarene carpenter was He who at the right hand of God should judge the world and receive the homage of the universe. But time has made the one truth certain, and it will establish the other. It must be so—1. *Because God can never be ignorant of what His creatures are best fitted for.* 2. *Because no selfish motive or lack of power can ever interfere with the justice of His dealings.* 3. *Because the infinite goodness of God must make Him ever in favour of using any good that He finds in His creatures for the benefit of the race.* The subject teaches us—(I.) That moral worth is the true beauty. All the beauty of material things is but a shadow of a higher beauty—of that beauty which makes God the most beautiful Being in the universe. As He is a Spirit, and cannot be apprehended by our senses, that which makes Him the object of admiration and worship to the best of His creatures is that beauty of goodness which appeals to their spiritual nature. And the truest and highest beauty of men or angels is that beauty which is of the same kind as God's. (II.) We should form our standard of excellence upon God's standard. To honour and exalt a man for any superiority of physical beauty or birth, is to render him homage for that for which he is not responsible, and is consequently most foolish. Yet it is a mistake into which men often fall. But in this respect, as in many others, God's

thoughts are not as man's thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. If we are wise we shall, so far as finite creatures can, make God's standard of excellence ours, by looking not at the outward appearance nor regarding external circumstances, but by giving our honour and confidence to those who possess the "beauty of the Lord God" (Psa. xc. 17).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 6, 12. *Difficulty of selecting men for important positions.* 1. *Causes* (a). Intrinsic difficulty of properly estimating character. (b). Management of partial friends. 2. *Lessons* (a). To avoid haste in deciding. (b.) To make diligent inquiries.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

Vers. 6, 7. So when godly men see their neighbours lovely in their lives, civil in their practices, high in their profession, strict in performances, they, according to their duty, say, inwardly at least, Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him, these are the blessed of the Lord, anointed to the kingdom of heaven; but God may often answer them, Look not on their profession or their performances, for I see their hearts, that they serve not me, but themselves of me . . . Observe at what a high rate that which is nothing worth is valued in a time of famine. Truly so, there is such a scarcity of true godliness, that godly men, who exceedingly long for the advancement of Christ and Christianity in men's hearts and houses, prize and encourage anything that cometh near it.—*Swinnock.*

Ver. 7. Muscularity is not Christianity, and bodily beauty is not holiness. Not how you look, but what you are, ought to be the first care of your lives; for if you have a selfish disposition, a sordid soul, or a sinful life, your outward beauty will be like "a jewel in a swine's snout," and your bodily vigour will only be like the strength of a safe in which nothing worth preserving is locked up.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Objectors to the history of the Old Testament have dwelt much upon the title, "the man after God's own heart," which is continually given to David. "Is he not," they have said, "directly chargeable with adultery and murder . . . . Is this the man whom a righteous God would declare to be the object of His special complacency?" . . . Divines have met these questions with an answer of this kind: "The epithet which you complain of belongs not to David personally but officially . . . He did the work he was appointed to do. He fulfilled God's counsel. So far he was a man after God's own heart." . . . A very little reflection upon the words themselves, still more a slight study of the history of David, should surely have prevented any man from employing this kind of apology. "God trieth the reins." That general principle is here applied expressly to the case of David.—*Maurice.*

I. A solemn thought. He knows fully all that characterises the inward and spiritual nature of man. **II.** How comforting! You may be misunderstood by men. Your purest motives may be misinterpreted. . . But there is an appeal to the Judge of all.—*Steel.*

Ver. 11. One of our greatest poets once remembered this question of Samuel's after he had studied and mastered the writings of the most prominent philosophers and wise men of this world, and had found in none of them anything stable and satisfactory. Then with scorn he wrote these lines:

> "Ach ich war auch in diesem Falle!
> Ais ich die Weisen hört'und las;
> Da jeder diese Welten alle
> Mit seiner Menschenspaune maaß
> Da fragt 'ich! Aber sind sie das
> Sind das die Knaben alle?"

This case was mine too when at leisure,
What all the sages wrote I read,
When with their small wits they would measure
The wealth of worlds around us spread:
I thought of Samuel then, when he
Made Jesse's sons in row appear,
And when the seven were counted, said,
Are all thy children here?

Goethe.

O that this prince of poets had not after all omitted to count in *One!*—*Krummacher.*

It was certainly not by accident that the son on whom the Divine choice fell was at the very moment keeping his father's sheep. . . . . His early employment had a direct and Divine bearing on the latter. . . . 1. As a shepherd, the *sense of responsibility to another* was powerfully called into exercise. The flock was not his own. In keeping it he was acting merely as his father's servant. . . . . The *servant-feeling* thus beautifully called into play was transferred, in full integrity, to the higher sphere of the kingdom. . . . 2. The shepherd-occupation of David led him, from its very nature, *to seek the welfare of the flock.* It demanded unceasing attention to its condition as a whole, and to the state of each several animal; frequent exposure to danger, and constant readiness to sacrifice his own ease or comfort. . . . . These were the ideas of *duty* with which David became familiar as a shepherd. And when his charge was changed these ideas of duty remaining in his heart, and influencing his public conduct, made him the eminent ruler he became. . . . 3. In his office as a shepherd David had constantly to study the *increase and improvement* of the flock. It was not enough for the shepherd to keep the flock as he got it. The flock was not properly kept unless every season brought a great increase to its number. The same thought manifestly influenced David's kingly administration. He constantly consulted for the progressive improvement and elevation of his people. . . . 4. The shepherd employment of David, by leading him *to give special attention to the weak, helpless, and distressed of the flock*, trained him for one of the most blessed and Christ-like functions of a godly ruler.—*Blaikie.*

When we look forward in the light of Divine revelation, the early part of David's consecrated life contains many typical elements as factual prophecies or pre-figurations of the future. His shepherd life—continued after he was anointed, in which *on the one hand*, self-consecrated, he immerses himself in the contemplation of God's revelation in nature and in His word, and *on the other hand* must be ready at any moment to meet the greatest dangers, and exhibit boldness and prowess (xvii. 34–37)—presents on these two sides types of his religious life as king, the Spirit of God developing on the basis of this double natural ground two sides of his character which not merely co-exist but are interwoven with each other: (1) *intensively* the innermost concentration and immersion of his thoughtful meditative heart into the depths of God's revelation of His power, grace, and wisdom in nature, word, history, and into the depths of the sinful human heart, whence sprang in his psalms partly the inspired praise of God, with furtherance and deepening of the knowledge of God, partly advance in the natural grace, lacking condition of the human heart; (2) *extensively* his admirable energy and heroic courage in the life of conflict which he had evermore to lead. In the hiddenness of his royal calling from the people, the gradual ripening of his inner life for his office, and the lowliness of the sphere whence he was raised to the throne, he is a type of Christ, who sprang from him according to the flesh . . . . passes His holy youth in privacy, and then at the end of this Divine-human development steps forth from the lowliness of a natural human life as the King of Israel, who completes in his person and work God's revelations for the establishment of His kingdom on earth, and therein enters on the war of subjugation against the ungodly world.—*Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—18.

SAUL AND DAVID.

I. Both the Spirit of God and the agents of Satan seek congenial soil for their operations. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon David, He found a heart prepared to receive His influence and to profit by it. David had already yielded himself up to those ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit which come to men in general, and he was therefore capable of receiving and being blest by a special outpouring of that same gracious and sanctifying power, to fit him for a sacred office and a special work. Those who have received into their minds the elementary principles of a science, or the rudiments of a language, possess a basis upon which a teacher may lay other truths concerning the same science or language; and so the pupil who has diligently mastered the alphabet of any branch of knowledge is the one most likely to be rewarded with further instruction. So the man who has profited by the spiritual light which has been already afforded him is in the way to receive a further revelation—he who has opened his heart to receive the teachings of Christ which have been given him has a basis upon which the Spirit of God can operate to his further enlightenment. The ingenuous confession of Nathaniel (John i. 40) showed that he was fit to receive greater knowledge, and to be made acquainted with greater and more glorious truths concerning Christ and His Kingdom; and hence the Saviour's promise: "*Thou shalt see greater things than these*" (ver. 50). The confession of Peter in Cæsarea Philippi (Matt. xvi. 16) showed that he had mastered the first lesson in connection with the Kingship of Christ; and because he thus gave proof of having made good use of the evidence concerning his Divine Master which had already been given him, he was permitted to receive more and more, and at last to be an "*eyewitness of His Majesty when He received from His Father honour and glory in the holy mount*" (2 Peter i. 16, 17). If Peter and his brother Apostles had not already yielded themselves up to the teachings which flowed from the every-day manifestations of their Lord, we may be sure they would not have been permitted to receive the higher revelation of His transfiguration. So was it with David. The Spirit of God found in him a basis upon which to raise a superstructure of such a character as would fit him to be a worthy ruler of the chosen people, and a type of Him who should hereafter rule the whole Israel of God (Micah v. 2). Saul also had been wrought upon by the Spirit of God, but although he had thereby become intellectually stronger and more fit for the kingly office, the more blessed and sanctifying influences of that Holy Spirit had found no receptive soil upon which to operate. His heart was like the rocky ground of our Lord's parable, where the few plants which sprung up soon withered away because they had no root (Matt. xiii. 6); and the powers of evil never leave such a heart untenanted. When a man resists the Holy Ghost as Saul did, He ceases at length to strive with him, and the Evil One, finding the house empty, sends his agents to take up their abode there, and so "the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Luke xi. 26).

II. The powers of evil are under Divine rule. A monarch has under his sceptre not only those obedient subjects who find their truest freedom in observing the statutes of the realm, but also the lawless and disobedient who yield him no willing service. Yet this latter class do serve by compulsion—as criminals and prisoners they may be used to do work which the free citizen could not do so well, and so they also may unwillingly render service to the king. So the powers of evil are subjects of the King of kings as truly as the angels of light; and although they are rebels against His righteous rule, they can do nothing without His permission, and sometimes in following the dictates

of their own evil natures they undesignedly fulfil God's purposes. This was remarkably the case in the experience of Job. Satan could only distress and afflict Job by Divine permission, and while he seemed to be only working out his own evil intentions, he was really fulfilling a Divine purpose towards a godly man. And the spirits of darkness are also made instruments of God's chastisement, especially in relation to men who are in rebellion against Him. We can conceive that this terrible but necessary work in a world of sinners could not be done by a good angel as it can be done by a fallen and malignant spirit; this we know from the teaching of Scripture in this passage, and in others, that God does so over-rule the malignity of evil spirits and evil men as to make them executioners of His judgments upon other sinners. The evil spirit which now troubled Saul was from the Lord in the sense that it was permitted to be an instrument of chastisement for his disobedience.

III. Even when God chastises for disobedience, He leaves some influences within reach of the offender to modify the punishment. Saul was not wholly forsaken of God while he was not wholly forsaken of men, for men "are that to us, and no more, than God permits them to be" *(Henry)*. Saul, a prey to his own evil passions, and to the malice of his spiritual adversary, could hardly have been at this time a good master or a man calculated to attract friends, yet there were those still around him who were sorry for him in his affliction, and who were anxious to alleviate his suffering. And so it is generally. When men, by a course of wilful transgression of Divine laws have brought upon themselves the penalty of mental or physical suffering, some kindly heart and hand is permitted by God to be moved in their behalf, and human sympathy and help lessens in some measure the weight of the deserved chastisement.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 13. Here was the sign that all the inward discipline and preparation of David had an object, another object than merely to make him a faithful keeper of sheep, or even a wise and righteous man. But a Divine sign is not a mere ceremony. It would be deceitful and insincere if there were not a present blessing denoted by it, the communication of an actual power to fit the man for tasks to which he has not hitherto been appointed. From that day forward there was a power within David stirring him to thoughts and acts which connected him directly with Israelites, with human beings. . . . . There is a time in men's lives, before they enter upon some great work to which they have been consecrated, a time when they are permitted to look back upon the years which they have already past, to see them no longer as fragments, but as linked together, as having a Divine purpose running through them which makes even their incoherences and discords intelligible. In such a time of retrospection, when the future is seen mirrored in the past, David may have found his harp much more than the mere solace of lonely hours, the mere response to his inward sorrows and thanksgivings. He may have begun to know that he was speaking for other men as well as for himself; that there were close and intimate fibres uniting men utterly unlike and separated by tracts of time and space; that there is some mysterious source of these sympathies, some living centre who holds together the different portions of each man's life, and in whom there is a general human life of which all may partake. The Spirit of God, which had taken possession of David, may have been teaching him these lessons and inspiring the song which was the utterance of them before he was prepared to come forth as the actual deliverer. And that Spirit will assuredly have been preparing him for his after conflicts, by making him feel that

he had, even then, enemies most fierce to struggle with, subjects most turbulent to subdue. The invisible God does not make known to man that He is his shepherd, without making known to him also that there are invisible powers more fearful than bears and lions, which would tear his flock asunder, which would bring each separate sheep into the valley of the shadow of death.—*Maurice.*

Ver. 14. The Power of darkness, which is *personal*, and in souls in the condition of that in which Saul's now was, finds all open for his operations, wrought in him with greater energy to deepen yet more and more that dreadful gulf which separated the king from Jehovah, eternally enthroned in the heavens; yea, to increase the estrangement of the miserable man from God yet more and more till it became a demoniacal hatred of God.—*Krummacher.*

In regard to the negative or privative declaration that "the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Samuel," we may take it to mean that God withdrew from him all those special aids which, in connection with his anointing to the royal office, had been conferred upon him. Perhaps, also, we may include in it the taking from him of those gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, without which a man becomes, in the saddest and solemnest of all senses, "abandoned." This is what Paul has described as a "being given over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. i. 28), and what, in the simple Saxon of our common speech, we call, "a being left to one's self." The Saviour has said, "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that he hath." Now, in Saul, we have a deeply suggestive instance of the execution of this sentence.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Man is governed by the Spirit from above, or by the spirit from beneath; there is no third course. For he is as little isolated in the invisible as in the visible world; he must be part of the organism of the one or the other of the invisible worlds; he belongs either to the kingdom of light or to the kingdom of darkness; he is guided either by the Spirit of the Lord or by the evil spirit, according as he decides for a permanent attitude of heart and direction of will to this side or that.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Whether any more be meant by this than that God, for Saul's hardened impenitence, withdrew His restraining and guiding grace, and left him a prey to his own passions, I cannot take upon me to say. This only I am sure of, that no man living needs a heavier chastisement from Almighty God than the letting his own passions loose upon him. The consequence to the mind, I apprehend, would in that case be much the same as it would be to the body, if the restraining power of the air were removed, and all the muscles, vessels, and humours left to the full freedom of their own powers and tendencies.—*Delany.*

Vers. 15, 18. Does not the penetration of these people excite our surprise? Are we not astonished at the far-reaching enlightenment which they manifest of the existence of a world of fallen spirits, whom Jehovah is wont to make use of, not seldom, for putting to trial His own people, as well as for visiting with punishment the wicked? Must we not conclude that they were indeed already acquainted with the book of Job, and that it was a constituent part of their holy canonical books? An Israelite adhered to his Bible under all circumstances, even when he was destitute of spiritual life and his conduct was condemned by it . . They recommend to him the power of music as a means for relieving his mind, but with a wise discriminating judgment regarding its character. . . . The servants knew well the power of music to produce, according to its kind and quality, not less the most depraved than the holiest impressions. Music can unfetter the most destructive passions; but it can also, at least for a time, tame and mitigate the wildest storms of the human heart. .

The music which the servants of the king thought of was not that which pleases the world, and which only opens the door to unclean spirits, but such as, animated by a nobler inspiration, might insensibly elevate the soul by its harmonious melody, as on angel's wings, towards heaven. They thought of the harp, then the most solemn instrument of music, and on the melodies which were wont to sound forth in the sanctuary at the time of the sacred festivals of Israel.—*Krummacher.*

If they had said, "Sir, you know that this evil comes from that God whom you have offended, there can be no hope but in reconcilement . . labour your peace with Him by a serious humiliation, make means to Samuel to further the atonement," they had been wise counsellors, divine physicians: whereas now, they do but skin over the sore, and leave it rankled at the bottom. The cure must ever proceed in the same steps with the disease, else in vain we shall seem to heal: there is no safety in the redress of evils but to strike at the root.—*Bp. Hall.*

We see here, distinctly marked, these two things, the plan of God and the liberty of man . . . . . David, in his devotion to his harp, had no thought of thereby rising to the royal favour; the servant who mentioned his name to Saul had no idea of the fact that he was already anointed to be Saul's successor; yet each, in his own way, and by working out the choice of his own free will, was helping on the fulfilment of the purposes of God. So it is still, the only difference being that, in ordinary history, we are not always thus permitted to see the different agencies at work.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19-23.

DAVID AT COURT.

We here have—

I. **Saul an instrument of good to David.** David was one day to sit upon the throne of Israel, and although he already possessed many qualities of mind and heart which fitted him for such a position, the transition from the home at Bethlehem to the palace was a very great one, and the man who was to experience it needed some intervening training. It was expedient that he should have some experience of the life of the court before he became its head, and, in the providence of God, the man whom he was to succeed was the instrument by whom he gained that experience.

II. **David a means of blessing to Saul.** Saul, miserable and God-forsaken though he was, was not yet beyond the soothing power of sacred music, and it was ordained by God that David's skill and piety should administer this passing comfort to his spirit. Music seems to have been left to us by God to remind us—1. *Of the moral harmony of the heavenly world.* All the inhabitants of the city of God live in a state of concord as perfect and as morally beautiful as the most exquisite music. There creatures of various gifts and diverse dispositions so perfectly agree with each other that no note of discord is ever heard, and the diversity of each only heightens the harmony of the whole. 2. *Of the harmony that once ruled in the human soul.* The soul of man has not always been torn asunder by conflicting passions, or by the promptings of good on the one side and of evil on the other. Conscience did not always assume the position of a sentinel and stand with drawn sword to avenge the first transgression of the law written upon the human heart. There was a time when conscience had only one work to do—to approve of human deeds and so add to human happiness instead of being also compelled by human sinfulness to take the attitude of a reprover and a judge, and so increase the discord within the human soul. Music reminds us of what man's inner life was when God first created him

morally in His own image—when every faculty and feeling and desire was in perfect harmony with each other, and with all that is beautiful and good. 3. *Of the harmony of the Divine nature.* In proportion as the Christian's heart and life approaches perfect conformity to the will of God, he finds a music within the soul which passeth all understanding. If he could look back upon all his past life and feel conscious that he had never wronged either himself, or his neighbour, or his God, and if he could feel confident that his whole future would be as perfect as his past, how blessed would be the harmony within! This is the experience of God—this makes Him ever and perfectly blessed—this makes His whole being perfectly free from any shadow of discord, and constitutes music a type of the harmonious blending of all the glorious attributes of His character.

III. Music, by shadowing forth these moral truths, is intended to comfort and to elevate mankind. If, when the soul is cast down by sorrow or degraded by sin, it will yield itself to the influence of this gift of God, rays of light will penetrate the darkness, and a dew of hope will fall upon the scorched soul. If even Saul became for a season delivered from the bondage of evil, when he listened to the sweet sounds of David's harp, music must be one agency to lift the soul of man into communion with the unseen world and the unseen God, and so to do something towards restoring it to its original harmony. That it has such a tendency we have abundant evidence from the testimony of experience. "Music," says Luther, "is one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God, to which Satan is a bitter enemy, for it removes from the heart the weight of sorrow and the fascinations of evil thought. Music is a kind and gentle sort of discipline, it refines the passion and improves the understanding." And in most of the revivals of spiritual life in the Church of God, music has been one of the agencies employed. It follows therefore that redeemed men ought to cultivate a knowledge of music, and render thanks unto God for having left us this reminder of heaven and of Himself.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF VERSE 23.

This remarkable instance of the power of music over the mind is in conformity with the experiments of physicians, and with various intimations which may be found in ancient authors . . . In the *Mèmoires* of the French Academy of Sciences for 1707, are recorded many accounts of diseases which, having obstinately resisted the remedies prescribed by the most able of the faculty, at length yielded to the powerful impressions of harmony. One of these is the case of a person who was seized with fever, which soon threw him into a very violent delirium, almost without any interval, accompanied by bitter cries, by tears, by terrors, and by an almost constant wakefulness. On the third day, a hint that fell from himself suggested the idea of trying the effect of music. Gradually, as the strain proceeded, his troubled visage relaxed into a most serene expression, his restless eyes became tranquil, his convulsions ceased, and the fever absolutely left him. It is true that when the music was discontinued his symptoms returned; but by frequent repetitions of the experiment, during which the delirium always ceased, the power of the disease was broken, and the habits of a sound mind re-established. Six days sufficed to accomplish a cure . . . More remarkable, as well as more truly parallel, is the case of Philip the Fifth of Spain and the musician Farinelli, in the last century. The king was seized with a total dejection of spirits, which made him refuse to be shaved, and incapable of appearing in council or of attending to any affairs. The queen, after all other methods had been essayed, thought of trying what might be effected by the influence of music, to which the king was known to be highly susceptible. We have no doubt that this experiment was suggested to her by this case of Saul and David. The celebrated musician Farinelli was invited to Spain, and it was contrived that there should be a concert in a room adjoining the king's apartment, in which the artist should perform one of his captivating songs. The king appeared surprised at first, then greatly moved, and at the end of the second air he summoned the musician to his apartment and, loading him with compliments, asked him how he could reward such talents. Farinelli, previously tutored, answered that he desired nothing but that his majesty would permit his attendant to shave and dress him, and that he would endeavour to make his appearance in the council as usual. The king yielded, and from this time his disease gave way, and Farinelli had the honour of the cure. *Kitto.*

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 19. While David followed the sheep he had ample time at his disposal, but instead of letting it go by in idleness, or frittering it away in spasmodic study, now of this thing now of that, he specially concentrated his attention on the art of music, until he acquired rare skill and excellence in playing upon the harp, and it was through this self-taught attainment that he was first called forth into public life. It is of immense consequence that the young people of these days should see the necessity of acting in a similar manner. . . . . It is a preparation for future eminence. It is interesting to observe how many have passed through this very gate to usefulness and honour.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Ver. 23. There is a mystery and a meaning in music we can never either expound or explore; and it is felt that those natures which are the greatest burden and mystery to themselves find most the solace of song in the combinations of all sweet sounds; we have known this, it is not always that in joyfulness of heart we sing. . . . I have known a woman, disappointed and forsaken, flying to her piano; her fingers rushing over the keys have given liberation to her spirit, and the chords opened the sealed well of tears, and the rains descended and the floods came. And something like this is a very general experience. Hence we have poetry for all cultured people and hymns for holy people; and do we not know what it is to become happy while we sing?—*Hood.*

It was a song without words whose soothing melody fell upon the ear of the king. Words corresponding to the music would have produced the contrary result to that which was aimed at, and might even have increased the ill temper of the king. There are even yet men enough of this sort—persons without faith, yea, at variance both with God and the world — whom solemn music is able most powerfully to delight, and in whom it awakens, at least for the time, dispositions which border on devotion and piety, while yet the words which correspond to the sacred melody would produce in them the very opposite effect. What is manifest from this, but that in the soul of such persons the last point at which they may be touched by that which is sacred has not yet wholly decayed away?—*Krummacher.*

It was a mere foreshadow, on a comparatively low and earthly ground, of the wondrous way in which David, as the Psalmist, was afterwards to provide the true "oil of joy for the mourner," and to become a guide to the downcast soul "from the horrible pit," up to the third heaven of joy and peace.—*Blaikie.*

The music was more than a mere palliative. It brought back for a time the sense of a true order, a secret, inward harmony, an assurance that it is near to every man, and that he may enter into it. A wonderful message, no doubt, to a king or a common man, better than a great multitude of words, a continual prophecy that there is a deliverer who can take the vulture from the heart, and unbind the sufferer from the rock; but not (as many, I suppose, must bitterly know) the deliverer itself.—*Maurice.*

CHAPTER XVII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**The Philistines gathered together their armies.**" Jamieson considers that this was twenty-seven years after their overthrow at Michmash. "**Shochoh,**" now *Shuweikek*, a village in the hilly region between the mountains of Judah and the plain of Philistia, about eleven miles south-west of Jerusalem and of Bethlehem. "**Azekah.**" Not certainly identified, but probably the same as Zakariyeh, another site of ancient ruins, about two miles distant, on the same side of the valley. "**Ephes-dammim,**" now *Damûm*, four miles north-east of Shuweikek.

Ver. 2. "**Valley of Elah,**" or the *Terebiuth* Valley. "**A long, broad, depressed plain, lying between two parallel ranges of hills. The *terebiuth*, the *shittimwood* (the *butin* of the Arabs): probably some remarkable tree of this species which grew there. It is now *Wady-es-Sumt*, valley of the acacia tree, with which at present it abounds. This valley, formed by the junction of three lateral ones—viz., Wady-el-Musûrr from the east, Wady-es-Sûr from the south, and another, name unknown, from the north—opens into the great Wady-Sûrâr, anciently the Valley of Sorek. It is a fertile plain flanked on the north and south by lowly hills, and abounding with grain produce, except in the spots covered by acacia thickets and olive plantations. Robinson states that the largest terebiuth he saw in all the country was in Wady-es-Sûr, a little above the spot where it emerges into Wady-es-Sûmt.**" *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 4. "**Champion.**" Literally, the *man in the midst*, the *middleman*—**one who advances between two armies to decide the battle by single combat. Wordsworth renders it "*the mediator.*" "Six cubits and a span.**" The cubit is variously computed at eighteen or twenty-one inches. The height of Goliath cannot therefore be certainly estimated, but must have been from nine to ten-and-a-half feet. "According to the calculation made by Thenius, about nine feet two inches Parisian measure; **a great height no doubt, though not altogether unparalleled, and hardly greater than that of the great uncle of Iren, who came to Berlin in the year 1857. According to Pliny, the giant Pusia and the giant Secundilla, who lived in the time of Augustus, were ten feet three inches (Roman) in height; and a Jew is mentioned by Josephus who was seven cubits in height, *i.e.*, ten Parisian feet, or if the cubits are Roman, nine-and-a-half.**" *(Kiel.)*

Ver. 5. "**Coat of mail.**" Literally, **a *scale-corslet*. A corslet made of metal plates overlapping each other like the scale of a fish. "Five thousand shekels.**" The copper shekel is estimated to have weighed about an ounce. "**According to Thenius, the cuirass of Augustus the Strong, which has been preserved in the historical museum at Dresden, weighed fifty-five pounds.**" *(Kiel.)*

Ver. 6. "**Greaves.**" "**Boots for the defence of the leg, rising to nearly the knee, and without feet, terminating at the ankle; made of bull's hide, leather, wood, or in one plate of metal, but rounded to the shape of the leg, and often lined with felt or sponge. Some of the ancient greaves, however, did not come so far up as the knee.**" *(Jamieson.)* "**Target.**" Rather a *lance* or short spear. "**Thenius proposes to alter the expression 'between his shoulders,' because it does not appear applicable to a spear or javelin, which Goliath must have suspended by a strap, but only to a small shield slung over his back. . . But the difficulty founded upon the expression has been fully met by Bochart, in the examples which he cites from Homer, Virgil, etc., to prove that the ancients carried their own swords slung over their shoulders. And Josephus understood the expression in this way. Goliath had no need of any shield to cover his back, as this was sufficiently protected by his coat of mail. Moreover, the allusion to the same piece of armour in ver. 45 evidently points to an offensive weapon, and not to a shield.**" *(Kiel.)*

Ver. 7. "**Weaver's beam.**" "Rather under five feet long." *(Jamieson.)* "**One bearing a shield.**" Rather, *the* shield. "**In consequence of their great size and weight, the Oriental warrior had a trusty and skilful friend, whose office it was to bear the large shield.**" *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 8. "**Am I not a Philistine?**" Rather, *the* Philistine. "**The meaning is, Why would you engage in battle with us? I am the man who represents the strength of the Philistines, and ye are only servants of Saul. If ye have heroes, choose one out, that we may decide the matter in a single combat.**" *(Keil.)*

Ver 10. "**I defy;**" or, "**I have mocked.**" *(Keil.)* "**Goliath's scorn and contempt of Israel lay not merely in the reproach that they were Saul's slaves, and in the tone of his words, but in the challenge itself, because it was not answered.**" *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 12. "**The full account of the person and family of David tells what we already know from chap. xvi., and yet reads as if nothing had been said of his origin. This suggests that the redactor of the book here appends and works in a narrative concerning David, which began with the family history, and then related the combat with Goliath, and its occasion. This view is evidently supported by the 'that' or 'this,' which is evidently added to connect the words**

with chap. xvi. 1. The last words of the verse relating to Jesse the Ephrathite (that is, of *Ephrath*, the old name for Bethlehem, Gen. xlviii. 7) are difficult. . . . It seems best with Grotius, Thenius, after Sept., Vulg., Syr., Arab., to substitute 'in years,' instead of the text, and render 'he was advanced in years.'" (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 15. "**But David went and returned.**" Rather he "was going and returning," *i.e.*, "he went backwards and forwards from Saul to feed his father's sheep in Bethlehem, so that he was not in the permanent service of Saul, but at that very time was with his father." (*Keil.*) "This he could do, since Saul was not always in the gloomy state which required David's harp. . . . . As totally unpractised in war (so chap. xvi. supposes him to be) David, notwithstanding his enrolment among the court-esquires (armour-bearers), could not be needed by Saul in war, and he needed not to be taken along for his music, because in the midst of military affairs Saul's mind was concentrated on *one* point, held by *one* thought." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 17. "**Take now for thy brethren.**" "In those days campaigns rarely lasted above a few days. The soldiers were volunteers or militia, who were supplied with provisions from time to time by their friends at home. The Arab women still carry provisions to their husbands when out on fighting expeditions." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 18. "**Ten Cheeses,**" or "slices of curdled milk." "**Oriental cheeses** are very small, resembling in shape and size our penny loaves, as the cheeses of the ancient Hebrews seem also to have been (cf. Job x. 10; Psalm lxxxvi. 15), and although they are frequently made of so soft a consistence as to resemble curds, those which David carried seem to have been fully formed, pressed, and sufficiently dried to admit of their being carried." (*Jamieson.*) "**Take their pledge.**" "This was a *token* which, though David had seen them, would be of especial value to the father's heart as an immediate sign from their own hands that they were alive and well (in place of a letter)." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 19. This should be read as part of Jesse's address to David substituting *are* for the "were" of the English version.

Ver. 20. "**Keeper.**" "The only instance in which the hired shepherd is distinguished from the master or one of the family." (*Jamieson.*) "**Trench.**" Or "waggon-rampart," doubtless a kind of rude fortification formed by a line of waggons and chariots.

Ver. 22. "**His carriage,**" *i.e.*, his baggage.

Ver. 25. "We must conclude that Saul actually made these promises although nothing is afterwards said of their fulfilment, especially as the same thing is repeated in Ver. 27. From Saul's tendency to rash and exaggerated action, and from his changeableness, we can easily understand both the promise and his unwillingness to perform it." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 26. "**Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?**" "These words contain the *ground* of the preceding thought that the insult offered to Israel must be wiped out. This *ground* lies in the contrast between the stand-point of the Philistine as an *uncircumcised* who has no community with the living God and the stand-point of this covenant people . . . . The *living* God is emphasized over against the dead idols of the Philistines." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 28. "Eliab's questions express the thought (1) Thou hast nothing to do here, indicating a haughty, quick judging nature, and (2) reproach David with neglect of duty." (*Erdmann.*) "**Thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.**" "Such an idea could not have occurred to him had not the warlike tastes of David already been well known to his family. It is more than probable, from this and other circumstances, that he had already wished to join in the first instance with his brothers, but had not been allowed by his friends to do so. But this is hardly sufficient to account for the expressions of Eliab, which must have been founded on a wider experience; and to those who have studied the character of David it will appear almost certain that he had often been led to speak of his desire to see Israel rid of the oppressors who had laid her honour in the dust, and of his hope to take some part in the great work of rending the Philistine yoke from her fair neck." (*Kitto.*)

Ver. 29. "**Is there not a cause?**" Rather, "*Is there not a word?*" "Is not this word permitted me? Can I not seek information by such a word?" (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 34. "**A lion and a bear.**" "At present lions do not exist in Palestine, although they must in ancient times have been numerous. The lion of Palestine was in all probability the Asiatic variety described by Aristotle and Pliny, as distinguished by its short, curly mane. It was less daring than the longer-maned species, but when driven by hunger it not only ventured to attack the flocks in the desert in the presence of the shepherd (Isa. xxxi. 4), but laid waste towns and villages (2 Kings xvii. 25, 26). The shepherds sometimes ventured to encounter the lion single-handed, and the vivid figure employed by Amos (chap. iii. 12), the herdsman of

Tekoa, was but the transcript of a scene which he must have often witnessed. The variety of the Asiatic bear which inhabits the Himalayas is especially ferocious, and it is probable that the same species among the mountains of Armenia is the animal of Scripture." *(Biblical Dictionary.)*

Ver. 36. **"Thy servant slew,"** etc. "These useful feats of David seem to have been performed with no weapon more effective than the rude staves usually carried in the hand of an Eastern shepherd, particularly the iron-headed club (Psa. xxiii. 4). 'I have known,' says Dr. Wilson (*Lands of the Bible*) 'a shepherd in India encounter with it a tiger which he found mangling one of his goats. It is much in use among the Fellahin of Wady Mûsa, and the Arabs in general.'" *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 38. **"Saul armed David,"** etc. David must therefore have been near the stature of Saul, or he could not have worn his armour; it might, however, have been a loose corslet, or capable of a change by tightening.

Ver. 40. **"His sling."** "The sling consisted of a double rope, with a thong, probably of leather, to receive the stone. The slinger held a second stone in his left hand. Shepherds in the East carry a sling and stones still for the purpose both of driving away and killing the enemies of the flock. It was and is a favourite weapon in Syria and Arabia." *(Jamieson.)* Some of the Fathers of the Church, and a few modern commentators, see in this encounter of David and Goliath a type of our Lord's encounter with Satan. Wordsworth says, "So our David, the Good Shepherd, went forth to meet the enemy, not with sword or spear but with a pastoral staff, nor did He put forth His Divine power by any miraculous exercise of it against the tempter. . . . He chose five stones out of the brook; He took the five books of Moses out of the flowing streams of Judaism," etc., etc.

Ver. 43. **"Am I a dog,"** etc. "The staff was ordinarily employed not against men but beasts. . . . Similar are the scornful defiances which warriors of antiquity mutually gave at the beginning of a combat." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 45. **"The Lord of Hosts,"** etc. Jehovah Sabaoth (see on chap. i. 3). "The *name* of the Lord is for David the totality of all the revelations by which the living God has made Himself known and named among His people. Of these elements, which form the conception of the name of God, he here—suitably to the situation—adduces those which characterise Him in respect to His warlike and ruling power as captain and conqueror of His people." (Psa. xxiv. 10.) *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 49. **"The stone sunk."** Wordsworth thinks that here a supernatural power was put forth.

Ver. 52. **"The valley,"** etc. As no name is given to this valley, and as the Hebrew word for Gath is very similar, both Keil and Erdmann think that Gath ought to stand here, as in the following verse. "This direction of the flight resulted from the nature of the country. The Wady Sumt, where the conflict took place, passes northward from Socoh, turns after two or three miles westward by the villiage *Sakarieh*, emptying into the Wady Simchim. About a mile from this is the village of Aijur, which is held to be ancient Gath, and so the Philistines fled through that valley that Robinson also traversed when he journeyed from Jerusalem to Gath. Another portion of the Philistines remained in Wady Sumt and fled northward, where the Wady Sumt takes the name of Wady Surar, in which lies the present city Akir." (*Stähelin*). (Travellers are not quite agreed as to the site of Gath).

Ver. 54. **"And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem,"** etc. "The word translated tent is an antiquated term for dwelling place. The reference is to David's house at Bethlehem, to which he returned with his booty after the defeat of Goliath. There is no anachronism in these statements, for the assertion made by some, that Jerusalem was not yet in the possession of the Israelites, rests upon a confusion between the citadel of Jebus upon Zion, which was still in the hands of the Jebusites, and the city of Jerusalem, in which Israelites had dwelt for a long time. (See Josh. xv. 63 and Judg. i. 8). Nor is there any contradiction between this statement and chap, xxi. 9, where Goliath's sword is said to have been kept in the tabernacle at Nob: for it is not affirmed that David *kept* Goliath's armour in his own home but only that he took it thither. . . . Again, the statement in chap. xviii. 2, to the effect that after David's victory over Goliath Saul did not allow him to return to his father's house any more, is by no means at variance with this explanation of the verse before us. For the statement in question must be understood as signifying that from that time forward Saul did not allow David to return to his father's house as he had done before." (*Keil*).

Ver. 55. **"Whose son is this youth?"** etc. Some critics regard these last four verses as an interpolation, as well as the paragraph between verses 12-31. Their opinion is founded upon apparent indiscrepancies in the narrative, most of which have been met in the comments. Keil and

other commentators see no reason for doubting their genuineness. The following are their solutions of the apparent contradiction in this question of Saul, to the statement in chap. xvi. 21-23. "It is only necessary to admit that David's absence at home had been long (and there is no exact chronological datum); that Saul had rarely seen him except in moments of madness; that Abner had been absent from court when David was there; and that the personal appearance of the latter had changed (suppositions which, taken singly or together, are not improbable), and Saul's ignorance becomes natural." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*) Wordsworth likewise suggests that David now appeared, not as before in the costume of a courtier or warrior, but in the homely dress of a shepherd, and that Saul's question does not necessarily imply ignorance of David, as he asks not his name, but the name of his father. "He had promised that whosoever killed the Philistine should have his own daughter in marriage, and he naturally wished to know the parentage of his future son-in-law." Dr. Jamieson adds to these the suggestion that "the rumour of Samuel's commission to anoint another king, and his journey to Bethlehem for that object, together with the fact that David had come from that village, and the suspicion, after the conquest of Goliath, which procured him so much glory throughout the nation, that David was destined for the throne, might have so excited his jealousy that he dissembled, and, pretending not to know him, kept his vigilant eye upon him with a view to accomplish the destruction of this young and formidable rival."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH,—Verses 12—29.

DAVID'S VISIT TO THE CAMP.

I. The truly great will not allow social advancement and natural gifts to interfere with the obedience which is due to parents. If a man is lifted to a higher condition of social life because he is mentally or morally greater than the rest of his family, that very greatness will lead him to render due honour to his parents, and this will be best shown by his obedience to their lawful commands. If a man deems that because he has risen in social life, or because he is intellectually superior to his father, he is absolved from a son's duty, he gives a convincing proof that he is not a truly great man, for he lacks that first element of greatness, viz., goodness. In this point Saul and David stand on a level, for both manifested a spirit of filial obedience (see chap. ix. 3, 4). David must have been conscious that he was destined for some great and honourable position in the kingdom, but he was not unduly elated by it, nor did he consider himself thereby freed from his duty to his father. In this he showed himself worthy to be a type of a far greater man—of that Divine Son of David who for many years of His life was subject to His human parents (Luke ii. 51), and in so doing has left an example to all sons and daughters, especially to those who are consciously mentally or morally greater than their parents.

II. Inferior spirits are always envious at the elevation of their superiors, and the envy is deep in proportion as the relationship is near. Eliab had seen Samuel anoint David, and although he might not have understood the full significance of the act, he had never recovered the shock he had then sustained at seeing his younger brother preferred before him. He now gives full proof how inferior he was to that despised and hated brother by revealing the envy that ruled his own spirit. It was this demon which prompted him so to misconstrue David's words and actions. If we look at the most beautiful human face through a coloured and distorted medium we do not see it as it is, for that through which we look imparts to it its own hue and misrepresents the true outline. So it is impossible rightly to estimate a character if we look at it under the influence of envy. Seen through that distorted medium, actions performed from the purest motives, and words the most blameless, will be misjudged and misrepresented. Thus it was that Eliab so misjudged his brother. And the devil is not less malignant, but rather more so, when the objects of its hatred are a man's own flesh and blood. A man shows himself thus blind to his own interests, for the elevation of one member of a family often leads to the

elevation of the rest. Eliab might have considered that the honour thus conferred upon David would reflect some honour upon his brethren also—that he was himself raised in the elevation of his brother. But envy does not allow a man to reason, and the more nearly related the person who awakens envy is to the envious man the more does the latter seem to feel that he has been wronged. It is to David that Jesse's family owe their place in the Scripture record and in the annals of their nation. If it had not been for him we should never have heard the name of Jesse or his sons. Through him the name of his father is for ever coupled with the name that is above every name (Isa. xi. 1-9), and yet envy and reproach was his portion among his brethren.

III. Envy and insolence will be silenced by meekness and truth. David here uses weapons against his brother which were as effectual to silence him as his sling was to slay the giant. He has but to appeal to the facts, first that he has come there in obedience to his father's command, and secondly that the Philistine giant has been for many days asking for an Israelite to fight him and none has answered his challenge. "Is there not a cause?" says David, "Have I come without an errand?" and "Is there not a need that some one else should come into the camp besides those who are already in it?" To this question of David, asked without any upbrading, Eliab must have found it difficult to reply—there was nothing in it to provoke him to further wrath, but everything to awaken him to reason. David here displays his forbearance and his wisdom.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 28. Eliab sought for the splinter in his brother's eye, and was not aware of the beam in his own. The very things with which he charged his brother—presumption and wickedness of heart—were most apparent in his scornful reproof.—*Kiel.*

While all David's thought and feeling is on the great national disgrace and its removal, and his mind is concerned with plans for saving the honour of Israel and Israel's God, Eliab in his low and blind zeal thinks only of the flock of sheep and the possible loss of them from lack of oversight; the type of a narrow soul, incapable of great thoughts and deeds.—*Lange's Commentary.*

In times of general formality and lukewarmness, every degree of zeal which implies a readiness to go further or venture more in the cause of God than others do will be censured as pride and ambition, and by none more than near relations and negligent superiors; and such censures will seldom be unmingled with unjust insinuations, slanders, and attempts to blacken a man's character.—*Scott.*

It is quarrel enough, amongst many, to a good action, that it is not their own; there is no enemy so ready, or so spiteful as the domestical. The malice of strangers is simple, but of a brother it is mixt with envy. The more unnatural any quality is, the more extreme it is; a cold wind from the south is intolerable. David's first victory is of himself, next of his brother. He overcomes himself in a patient forbearance, he overcomes the malicious rage of his brother with the mildness of his answer. If David had wanted spirit, he had not been troubled with the insultation of a Philistine . . . That which would have stirred the choler of another, allayeth his. It was a brother that wronged him, and that his eldest. Neither was this time to quarrel with a brother, while the Philistines' swords were drawn, and Goliath was challenging. O that these two motives could induce us to peace! If we have injury in our person, in our cause, it is from brethren, and the Philistines look on.—*Bishop Hall.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—11, 30—58.

FAITH IN THE SEEN AND IN THE UNSEEN.

This narrative furnishes us—

I. With examples of faith in the seen and temporal. Such was the faith—1. *Of Goliath.* The tendency of all men is to put confidence in that which they can apprehend with their senses—that which appeals to their outward man. Physical strength—material greatness of any kind—anything that belongs to the seen and temporal—are the objects of their trust. In their opinion the race is always to the physically swift and the battle to the strong; they believe with the first Napoleon that "Providence is always on the side of great battalions," and in their estimate of things the unseen God goes for nothing because He is unseen. The faith of the Philistine was not in any unseen power—not even in the false gods of his own nation—but in his own arm of flesh—in his own extraordinary size and bodily strength. In this he is but a type of the great majority of men in all ages and in all nations—not only those who possess no written revelation of the unseen God, but of the far greater proportion of those who profess to believe in His existence. 2. *Of Saul.* Even Saul was dismayed when he heard the words of the Philistine (ver. 11), even he sought to restrain the shepherd youth from going forth to meet the man of war, although he knew that the latter was an "uncircumcised Philistine," and that David's confidence was in the living God. One of the first duties of a man in Saul's position is to acquaint himself with the history of the nation whom he rules, and lay to heart the lessons to be gained from it. And it could not be that he was ignorant of the great heroes of Israel who had gone before him—of Abraham, who with God for his shield had been able with three hundred men to put to flight the armies of the aliens—of Moses, who forsook Egypt and led Israel through the Red Sea because "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible"—of Gideon, of Barak, of Samson, and of Jephthah, who "*through faith subdued kingdoms and obtained promises*" (Heb. xi. 32, 33). How much was there in God's dealings with his forefathers to inspire him with hope and confidence in the unseen Jehovah, and to remind him that two are enough for any conflict if one is the Living God. If Saul had been in any degree worthy of his title and his position he would have been the first to accept the challenge of the heathen, and would have rejoiced in the opportunity of adding his own name to the long roll of Hebrew heroes who had proved over and over again how much more there is on the side of him who trusts in the Unseen and Eternal than on the side of those whose confidence is in the seen and temporal. But instead of this he furnishes an example of cowardice which had its root in the unbelief which had been the curse of almost all his kingly life, and which had brought upon him his present misery. There had been a short bright spot in his career when he, too, had been conscious that it was the "Lord who wrought salvation in Israel," and when he had fought and conquered in that assurance (chap. xi. 11–13). But the clouds of unbelief had long since obscured his vision of the unseen and the real, and made him a slave to the seen and the seeming. We cannot wonder that the armies of Israel manifested the same disposition. When the head is diseased the body will be affected also, when the well is poisoned the streams will be impure, and when the head of a community has no faith in God the moral disease is likely to run through all ranks and conditions of men beneath him. Seeing that unbelief in the unseen made Saul a coward, it is not surprising to find his army manifesting the same craven fear of the giant of Gath. We have—

II. An example of faith in the unseen and eternal. 1. *This faith was founded upon an experience of Divine help in past dangers.* If a man has been

in great peril of mind, body, or estate, and has in the day of his extremity been delivered by a friendly and powerful arm, he carries about with him ever after a consciousness of that deliverance and a faith in the person who saved him which nothing can destroy. If he is ever brought again into like circumstances or even into a more perilous position he will naturally turn again for help where he found it before. When a nation has been delivered from the hand of her enemies mainly by the courage of one heart and the skill of one ruling mind, she will instinctively confide in the same leader in her next time of danger. The eye of faith looks back upon past deliverances and sees in them the hand of God—this being so, in the next day of peril and need she appeals for help to the same Almighty source and confidently expects to receive it. This is a most logical resolution—"*Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge.*" (Psalm lxiii. 7). If we have present confidence in an arm of flesh because of help afforded in the past, how much more should we have faith in an unchangeable God in a present time of need when we can recall instances of His gracious interposition in past necessities. This is the argument of David, and such has ever been and ever will be the argument of faith, "*The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine.*" But only a man accustomed to discern an unseen hand in all the events of his life would have seen God in the deliverance from the lion and the bear, and only such an one therefore could have drawn hope and confidence from it for the present greater peril. David's life had been a life of faith in the unseen, and such a man is ready for any emergency. All the deliverances of his past life had been referred to the living God, and therefore he was not now afraid to trust Him for a greater and more important victory. 2. *This faith adopted the means most likely to lead to a victorious issue.* The faith of David was not the faith of a fanatic nor of one who interprets all God's promises without reference to conditions to be observed by man. He took a common-sense view of the matter, and used the best weapons within his reach to bring God into co-operation with his faith and his effort. The sling was the only weapon which was at all adapted to David's use under the circumstances. It would have been madness and presumption for the shepherd youth to have attempted a close encounter with Saul's weapons or with any weapons of that kind. But he had been accustomed from his childhood to use the sling which was especially adapted for use at a long range, and with which an expert could take a most certain aim (Judges xx. 16). He had no need to come within reach of the Philistine's sword or measure himself with him in a hand-to-hand combat. The very distance at which he stood would compensate for his inferior weight and add to the force of the blow, and the stone could be aimed at the only part of the giant's body which was unprotected by armour, viz., his forehead. Although we may see a supernatural hand in the issue of the event, we must remember that the effort of David was in harmony with natural laws and not against them, and that his confidence in God did not lead him to neglect the use of means, and those the very best at his disposal. The men of the strongest faith are the least given to presumption, but always put forth well-directed effort.

III. Faith in the unseen and Eternal justified by results. The expectations and desires of faith rest upon a solid foundation. The faith of David rested upon the Divine promises looked at in the light of the Divine faithfulness, and it was so strengthened by his own experience that he ventured confidently to predict the result before it came to pass (ver. 26). At this period of his history his desires were in entire sympathy with God, and he had therefore full ground for his confident prophecy that the Lord would deliver Israel's enemy into his hand. And the result fully justified his strong confidence, and showed that God regards

such a bold reliance upon Himself with especial favour. The faith of God's children in all ages rests upon the same foundation, and whenever the Church of God is threatened by some apparently mighty foe they have the same warrant as David had for predicting beforehand that victory shall be on their side because they are on the side of God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

That the world hostile to God's kingdom can long unpunished visit its scorn on the truth of the eternal and living God, is commonly a result of the inner weakness, disorder, and timidity of the members of the kingdom of God. When, therefore, there arises a man from their midst who, with mighty word and deed, encounters and conquers the foe, this is a direct interposition of God's hand in the development of His kingdom, and such a man is His chosen instrument for the casting down of the haughty worldly powers, and for a new gathering together and elevation of His people.—*Lange's Commentary.*

When we think of the tribal inheritance of Judah, still in a large degree retained by the Philistines, who ever and anon arose to reclaim it all, and sometimes nearly succeeded, we have a striking analogy to the heart of the believer, wherein divers sins and lusts do still contend for the mastery; and sometimes one of them, attaining Goliath-like proportions, threatens to enslave him altogether. Each of us has his own giant to fight, and here, too, it must be single combat, with no one to help us but He who went forth with the stripling David. . . . . Or, yet again, in contending with external evils, we may sometimes feel that they have assumed such magnitude as to appal us. Thus, which of us is not brought almost to a standstill when he surveys the ignorance, infidelity, etc., by which we are surrounded? It seems to us sometimes, in moments of depression, as if these evils were stalking forth defiantly before the armies of the Living God, and laughing them, Goliath-like, to scorn; and our courage is apt to cool as we contemplate this show of force. But the God of David liveth, and He will still give us success. The great danger that besets the Christian at such times is that of attempting to fight with the world's weapons. The worldling will always overcome him when he does so, because the Christian in such armour is not at home. . . . . Let him go forth with the cross of Christ in his hand, and by that he will conquer; but if he seek a lower weapon, and try to fight with force of law, or with earthly philosophy, or with mere social expedients, he will inevitably fail. What David's sling and stone were in the valley of Elah, that is the cross of Christ in the theological controversies, and social wranglings, and moral antagonisms of our age.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Ver. 10. Degenerate professors of religion often receive just rebukes from most decided enemies. . . . In human accomplishments the opposers of the truth of God have frequently possessed an undisputed superiority; confiding in this they have defied, and still do defy, the advocates of spiritual truth to engage with them.—*Scott.*

Ver. 11. The time was when Saul slew forty thousand Philistines in one day, and perhaps Goliath was in that discomfiture; and now one Philistine is suffered by him to brave all Israel for forty days. Whence is this difference? The Spirit of God, the spirit of fortitude, was now departed from him. Saul was not more above himself when God was with him, than he is below others now that he is left of God. Valour is not merely of nature; nature is ever like itself; he that is once valiant should never turn coward. But now we see the greatest spirits inconstant . . . He that is the God of

Hosts gives and takes away man's hearts at His pleasure. Neither is it otherwise in our spiritual combats . . . We have no strength but what is given us; and if the Author of all good gifts remit His hand for our humiliation, either we fight not, or are foiled.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 32. While base hearts are moved by example, the want of example is encouragement enough to an heroical mind; therefore is David ready to undertake the quarrel, because no man else dare to do it. . . . Even so, O Saviour, when all the generations of men run away affrighted from the powers of death and darkness, Thou alone hast undertaken and confounded them.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 37. In this recognition of God and confidence in Him, with which David entered upon public life, we have the root of the difference between him and Saul. . . . The tendency of Saul's life was towards himself; anything inconsistent with that in him, or about him, was but fitful and spasmodic. But it was just the reverse with David. The leaning of his soul was toward God, and though at times self and sin sadly and terribly asserted their power, yet these things were only occasional, and out of keeping with the usual course and current of his character. His sins, like Saul's impulses towards good things, were but occasional eruptions of that which it was the habit of his soul to repress; his piety, like Saul's impiety, was the principle of his life.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

To God he ascribes, not only his success in life, but his physical prowess. . . . And we must pause, ere we call such utterances mere Eastern metaphor. It is far more probable they were meant as, and were literal truths. David was not likely to have been a man of brute gigantic strength. So delicate a brain was probably coupled to a delicate body. Such a nature, at the same time, would be the very one most capable under the influence—call it boldly inspiration—of a great and patriotic cause, of great dangers and great purposes; capable, I say, at moments, of accesses of almost superhuman energy, which he ascribed, and most rightly, to the inspiration of God.—*Kingsley.*

Ver. 39. Let Saul's coat be never so rich, and his armour never so strong, what is David the better if they fit him not? It is not to be inquired how excellent anything is, but how proper. Those things which are helps to some may be encumbrances to others. An unmeet good may be as inconvenient as an accustomed evil. If we could wish another man's honour, when we feel the weight of his cares we should be glad to be in our own coat.—*Bp. Hall.*

History has presented many and diverse examples in the sphere of the spiritual life similar to this heroic march of David. Luther, in opposition to timid learned men, threw aside the heavy armour of scholastic wisdom, and stepping forward in freedom vanquished the giant of Rome with the five heads of his catechism. And other witnesses and combatants of the Church have with holy courage broken through the restraints of homiletic or liturgic forms, and in the free effusions and creations of their divinely anointed spirits, have given the tone to a new and more animating style of preaching, and thereby have opened the way to a new quickening and elevating of the life of the Church into greater fruitfulness.—*Krummacher.*

Ver. 44. Was ever such a proof given of the sin and folly of boasting, as in the case of Goliath? And yet, as we would say, how natural it was in him! We can almost sympathise with his disappointment when he found that the champion who was to meet him was so little "worthy of his steel." We can almost admire the chivalrous spirit that scattered defiance among a host of enemies. But just as it is so natural, and because it is so natural, is this spirit of boasting dangerous. In the spiritual conflict it is the surest presage of defeat. It was the Goliath

spirit that puffed up the apostle Peter, when he said to his Master, "Lord, I will go with Thee to prison and to death." It is the same spirit against which the apostle Paul gives his remarkable warning, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."—*Blaikie.*

Vers. 48–54. *The defeats which are prepared for the world by the kingdom of God:* 1. *Through what sort of combatants?* Through such as *(a)*, like David, heroically *lead the van* of God's host and decide the conflict (vers. 48), and *(b)* such as bravely *bring up the rear*, perseveringly pursuing the already smitten foe. 2. *With what sort of weapons? (a)* With weapons which *they themselves* have according to their calling through God's grace, and wield in reliance on God's help (ver. 49), and *(b)* with weapons which they take from the foe, in order to give him the finishing stroke with his own weapon (vers. 50, 51). 3. *With what result?* Annihilation of his power on his own ground (ver. 52), and in respect to the *booty*, rich gains (vers. 53, 54).—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 51. What needed David load himself with an unnecessary weapon? one sword can serve both Goliath and him. If Goliath had a man to bear his shield, David hath Goliath to bear his sword, wherewith that proud, blasphemous head is severed from his shoulders. Nothing more honours God than the turning of wicked men's forces against themselves. There are none of His enemies but carry with them their own destruction. Thus didst Thou, O Son of David, foil Satan with his own weapon: that whereby he meant destruction to Thee and us, vanquished him through Thy mighty power, and raised Thee to that glorious triumph and super-exaltation wherein Thou art, wherein we shall be with Thee.—*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 54. David brings the head of the Philistine champion in triumph to Jerusalem. Our David, Jesus Christ, ascended in triumph to the heavenly Jerusalem, bearing His trophies with Him, "leading captivity captive" (Psa. lxviii. 18; Ephes. iv. 8.)—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"The soul of Jonathan was knit,"** literally, "chained itself." (*Kiel*). "In almost all languages friendship is considered as a union of souls bound together by the band of love." (*Clericus*). **"Loved him as his own soul."** "To the conception of firmness is here added the idea of *innerness* of friendship, the complete *identification of essence* of two souls." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 2. **"Would let him go no more home."** See last comments on ver. 54 of the preceding chapter.

Ver. 3. **"Made a covenant."** "Such covenants of brotherhood are frequent in the East. They are ratified by certain ceremonies, and in presence of witnesses, that the persons covenanting will be sworn brothers for life." *(Jamieson).*

Ver. 4. **"Stripped himself of the robe,"** etc. "The mention of several weapons, which together make a complete war outfit, suggests that Jonathan wished to honour David as the military hero. . . . His clothing David with his own war-dress sets aside the barrier which his rank and position would raise between them in the first instance on the common ground of the theocratic chivalry, as whose representatives they had come to love one another." *(Erdmann).* "The gift of one's own garment, especially by a prince to a subject, is in the East still the highest mark of honour." (*Philippson*). See Esther vi. 8.

Ver. 5. **"David went out."** "That this refers to war and not to general business is plain, not only from the following account, which mentions not only military undertakings for Saul, but also from the statement of the position of general which he received in consequence of his success." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 6. "**When David was returned.**" "The *as they came* refers to the return of *the whole army* from the happily-ended war (comp. ch. xvii. 53); at the same time is mentioned David's return, with especial reference to this victory over Goliath, which had determined the successful issue of the war, in order to bring into its proper historical connection the honour which then accrued to him. This return of David, therefore (along with the whole army), is not synchronous with his return to Saul in chap. xvii. 57 immediately after the killing of the giant, but occurred after the victory over the whole Philistine army was completed . . . . There is, therefore, no contradiction between the statement that Saul kept David by him and gave him a military command, and the following statement that in consequence of the honour shown David he conceived a lasting hatred against him" (*Erdmann*). "**The women came out.**" "This is a characteristic trait of Oriental manners. On the return of friends long absent, and particularly on the return of a victorious army, bands of women and children issue from the towns and villages to form a triumphal procession to celebrate the victory, and as they go along, gratify the soldiers with dancing, instrumental music, and extempore songs, in honour of the generals who have earned the highest distinction" (*Jamieson*). "**Tabrets**, or timbrels." "Musical instruments resembling the modern tambourine." "**Joy.**" "This word, standing between two instruments of music, must denote the joyful cry which accompanied the beating of the tabrets" (*Erdmann*). "**Instruments of music,**" rather "*triangles.*"

Ver. 9. "**Eyed him.**" "*Looked askance* at him." (*Kiel.*)

Ver. 10. "**He prophesied.**" Rather, "*he raved*" (so *Keil* and *Erdmann*). "Saul's condition is neither that of simple madness nor that of true prophecy. He is under the control of a power higher than himself, but it is an evil power. For the precise expression of this supernaturally-determined condition of mind and soul, in which the whole spiritual energy of the man moves freely, yet in a sphere into which it is supernaturally brought, becoming for the time one with the spirit, the Hebrew has no other word than *naba*, and the English no other word than *prophecy.*" *(Translator of Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 11. "**Saul cast the javelin.**" "David's eluding him twice presupposes that Saul hurled the javelin twice, that is to say, he probably swung it twice without letting it go out of his hand—a supposition which is raised into certainty by the fact that it is not stated here that the javelin entered the wall, as in chap. xix. 10." (*Keil.*) "If Saul actually threw the spear, we could not understand David's twice retiring. Saul held the spear in his hand, and David stood so near him that he could save himself only by withdrawing." (*Bunsen.*)

Ver. 13. "**Captain over a thousand.**" This is a different military position from that mentioned in ver. 5; whether it was a promotion cannot be determined.

Ver. 19. "**Adriel the Meholathite.**" Nothing is known of this man.

Ver. 21. "**In the one of the twain.**" Literally, *in two.* Some commentators therefore understand that Saul offers his *two* daughters to David, purposing to take Merab from Adriel, and so lead David to make a double marriage. But the words may be rendered "a second time," and Kiel renders it "In a second way thou mayest become my son-in-law."

Ver. 22. "**Saul commanded his servants.**" David evidently paid no attention to Saul's second proposal, having so recently proved his fickleness with regard to Merab. Saul is therefore obliged to employ some of his courtiers to persuade David.

Ver. 25. "**Desireth not any dowry.**" "In Eastern countries the husband *purchases* his wife either by gifts or service. As neither David nor his family were in circumstances to give a suitable dowry for a princess, the king intimated that he would be graciously pleased to accept some gallant deed in the public service." *(Jamieson.)* "**Foreskins.**" Why not *heads?* Here is a sign of Saul's suspicious and malignant spirit; he, judging from himself, impiously suspected that David would go forth and destroy some of the Israelites, Saul's own subjects, as he himself desired to destroy David, his own deliverer; and the foreskins were required as a proof that they who were killed were not *Israelites.* This passage, and 2 Sam. i. 20, where the Philistines are styled "the uncircumcised," seems directly at variance with a well-known statement by Herodotus of the fact that circumcision was practised, not only by the Egyptians and Ethiopians, but by the Syrians of Palestine and the Phœnicians. But the two statements, though apparently conflicting, are capable of becoming adjusted. Subsequently to the time of Saul a great change took place in the population of the Philistine cities, and a considerable Egyptian element practising circumcision had probably been introduced." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 26. "**The days were not expired;**" that is, "the time to the marriage, or the time set by Saul for the performance of the warlike deed." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 30. "**The princes of the Philistines went forth**" "To battle, in order to avenge David's act, and perhaps supposing (as the Rabbis suggest) that according to the Hebrew law he would claim exemption from warfare for a year after his marriage." *(Wordsworth.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

I. The possession of analogous moral qualities will breed mutual love. There are material substances which have a singular affinity for each other because there are elements in each which are mutually attractive. The steel filings in the midst of a mass of other material will find their way to the magnet if it is placed anywhere near to them, and cleave to it with persistent force. And there are many bodies which possess elements which give them so strong an affinity the one for the other, that when the chemist places them together they lose their separate identity and the hitherto distinct substances become but one. So human characteristics and qualities—especially human excellences—form a basis of mutual affinity between those who are like-minded. A bold and courageous man is attracted to another who shows that he is also bold and courageous, and a man of strong emotions feels a drawing to another of an emotional nature. Jonathan and David evidently possessed some kindred excellences of character. If the shepherd boy had shown his courageous faith by meeting the giant single handed, the prince had displayed the same trustful boldness when he scaled the rock and entered the Philistine garrison, and they were evidently both possessed by an ardent concern for the welfare of their people, and by that humility of heart which is an accompaniment of all true greatness. When, therefore, the youthful son of Jesse stood before Saul, and both by his bearing and his word revealed what motives had prompted his action, the presence of kindred qualities in the breast of Jonathan sent his soul out to David, and that friendship was formed which will be renowned so long as the world shall last.

II. Love based upon affinity of soul is strong and will bear a great strain. Jonathan loved David "as his own soul." Self-love is strong and deep and is a Divinely commanded love. We are but obeying an instinct implanted within us by God when we manifest a due regard to our own personal welfare—in fact it is inconceivable that any being should be a stranger to such a feeling. Our Lord Himself tells us that our own spiritual well-being is to be the first object of our care when He asks, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. xvi. 27), and it is natural and right that our lower and secondary interests should be dear to us also. But there is a love which sets all these latter below the interests and the welfare of another, and such a love was that which David bore to Jonathan. It affords an example of the intensity to which love often grows when it is founded upon similarity of moral tastes and aspirations. It is then often equal to any test which can be brought to bear upon it, and forms a tie stronger than mere blood relation, making a man willing to forego all his earthly advantages for the good of his friend. The brook which is but a few inches deep will soon dry up under the rays of the summer's sun, or freeze when visited by the frosts of winter, but the deep broad river rolls on without being affected by either. So there are superficial friendships which vanish altogether when circumstances change, but the love born of kinship of soul outlives all the heats of prosperity and the frosts of adversity. Such was the love which Jonathan bore to David—a love which was as deep and abiding when his friend was an outlaw and a fugitive as when he was the favourite of the court, and a love which took no account of the fact that David was destined to occupy the place which Jonathan had once hoped to fill, and the duties of which he was fully competent to discharge. Although he never sat upon a throne, Jonathan's conduct to his rival gives full proof of his kingly nature.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 1-4. Jonathan, *the man of generous soul.* 1. Generous in *admiring.* (*a*) Not jealous, though his own military fame is eclipsed. (*b*) Fully appreciating the merit of a new and obscure man. (*c*) Admiring not only a brilliant exploit, but modest, grateful, and devout words. 2. Generous in *proposing friendship* where he might so naturally have indulged jealousy (as his father did). 3. Generous in *giving* what was not only valuable and suitable to his friend's present wants, but honourable as being associated with himself. Generosity, shown in mutual appreciation and mutual benefits, is the basis of sweet and lasting friendships, and in general is one of the noblest traits of human character.—*Trans. of Lange's Commentary.*

This was not a worldly friendship in which one, in loving another, in reality loves only himself and his own personal interests, but one of a higher nature, which formed the uniting bond. They loved each other truly in God, to whose service they had devoted themselves in the hours of holy consecration, ... and friendship which thus grows up and blossoms, rooting itself in a similarity of sanctified dispositions, takes a first place among our earthly blessings and possessions. There that communion of heart so unites together that one man becomes to another like a living canal, through which the inner life pours forth to him a stream of enriching and never-failing fulness of refreshing consolations and enjoyments. . . . . A Cleophas and his companion on the way to Emmaus; a Peter and the disciple who lay on Jesus' bosom; a Paul and his Timothy —how lovely are these double stars of sacred history pouring forth their rays upon us from heaven. . . . . Whoever is the object of such affectionate friendship, let him esteem it as a treasure of high and precious worth. Whoever, on the contrary, complains that he enjoys no such friendship, let him seek the cause of this, not in others, but in himself; since to him, without doubt, there are a-wanting, if not every endeavour after that which is noble, yet at least the heart-attracting virtues of humility, of purity, and love.—*Krummacher.*

There are, I fear, few such friendships between those who are nearly equals in eminence in the same profession. The proverb says, that "two of a trade never agree," and it takes high-toned principle to rejoice in the rise, to an equal position with ourselves, of one who is in the same calling with us. Provided there be sufficient distance between us, either in excellence, or success, the difficulty is not felt on either side. The young statesman, just entering on public life, has neither jealousy nor envy of the veteran leader who has by genius and perseverance made his way to the front rank of politicians, and the leader, in his turn, feels it easy to be cordial and encouraging to the young aspirant. But let the one see the other as nearly as possible on a level with himself, even in his own chosen department of excellence, and feel that he must probably soon consent to be second to him, and the case is altered. Then, almost in spite of themselves, jealousies and envyings will spring up between them; they will look askance at each other, and though they may not break out into open foes, there will be what I may call a sort of armed watchfulness between them, and a very little matter will set them in direct antagonism. The nearer individuals come into competition with each other, the greater is their tendency to be spiteful toward each other. It is easy to be a patron, and, stooping down from a lofty height, to take by the hand some struggling beginner; it is easy, too, to be an admiring pupil of one who is acknowledged to be a great way above us; but it is a much harder, and therefore a much nobler thing, to be the warm appreciative friend of one who is in the same calling with ourselves, and who is bidding fair to outshine and surpass us. It was a very generous

and noble thing that Jonathan did, when he took to his heart the youthful David.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Similitude of dispositions and estates ties the fastest knots of affection. A wise soul hath piercing eyes, and hath quickly discerned the likeness of itself in another ; as we do no sooner look into the glass of water, but face answers to face, and, where it sees a perfect resemblance of itself, cannot choose but love it with the same affection that it reflects upon itself.

No man saw David that day, which had so much cause to disaffect him ; none in Israel should be a loser by David's success, but Jonathan. Saul was sure enough settled for his time : only his successor should forego all that which David should gain ; so as none but David stands in Jonathan's light ; and yet all this cannot abate one jot or dram of his love. Where God uniteth hearts, carnal respects are too weak to dissever them, since that, which breaks off affection, must needs be stronger than that which conjoineth it.—*Bishop Hall.*

In merciful adaptation to the infirmities of his human spirit, God opened to David this stream in the desert, and allowed him to refresh himself with its pleasant water ; but to show him, at the same time, that such supplies could not be permanently relied on, and that his great dependence must be placed, not on the fellowship of mortal man, but of the ever-living and ever-loving God, Jonathan and he were doomed, after the briefest period of companionship, to a life-long separation, and the friendship which had promised to be a perpetual solace to his trials, only aggravated their severity when Providence deprived him of its comforts . . . In another view, David's intercourse with Jonathan served an important purpose in his training. The very sight he had of Saul's outrageous wickedness might have nursed a self-righteous feeling—might have encouraged the thought so natural to man, that as Saul was rejected by God for his wickedness, so David was chosen for his goodness. The remembrance of Jonathan's singular virtues and graces was fitted to rebuke this thought ; for, if regard to human goodness had decided God's course in the matter, why should Jonathan not have been chosen ? From the self-righteous ground on which he might have been tempted to stand, David would thus be thrown back on the providence of God, and in deepest humility constrained to acknowledge that it was by God's grace only that he was made to differ from others.—*Blaikie.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5—30.

David's Advancement and Saul's Decline.

I. The method of David's external elevation. It may be regarded as a general social law, that men who possess gifts which fit them for prominent and powerful positions amongst their fellow men, find their way sooner or later to those positions. And, although we recognise the operation of an overruling and Divine Providence in this fact, in relation to all men, yet it is not accomplished by any special interposition of the hand of God, but is the outcome of a natural law. The generality of men can discern, and are willing to acknowledge real greatness in their fellow creatures, and a man who is worthy of honour will, as a rule, be honoured. And if his social position has been an obscure one, he will soon be called to fill one which is more prominent. But the first step in his elevation will be in the hearts and consciences of his fellow men, and the other will follow as a necessary consequence. David's exaltation in the estimation of the people must have begun immediately after his victory over Goliath, and therefore, before Saul conferred any distinction upon him. He was elevated by the homage of his

fellow-subjects before he was set over them by the king, and it is not unlikely the known sentiment of the nation had some influence upon Saul's treatment of him. For at this period the external honours bestowed by the monarch seem to have kept pace with the growing esteem of the people, and to have been the seal of their regard. Even the courtiers, who were the most likely to be displeased with this new favourite of the king and people, "accepted" the youthful shepherd boy, and veteran warriors yielded to him their willing obedience. The whole narrative is a lesson on the only effectual means of obtaining elevation in life, namely, to seek to deserve it.

II. The method of Saul's internal downfall. Although this chapter leaves Saul where it finds him as to external position, yet it gives in detail some of the steps by which he descended from one moral platform of character to others lower and lower still. As David grew more and more fitted for the position he was to fill, so Saul, by the deterioration of his character, became more and more disqualified to be king of Israel. He reveals himself first as a *jealous* man. It became more and more apparent to him that David's popularity was increasing, and the inevitable consequence of allowing his mind to dwell upon this fact was the awakening within him of, perhaps, the most tormenting passion that can dwell in a human soul. It is not an easy thing for a man to feel no bitterness of spirit when he finds that another is gradually displacing him from a position of influence and honour which was once exclusively his own, and that the esteem and love which have hitherto been accorded to him are now being transferred to a successor. It requires great self-abnegation, and much unselfish love, to enable anyone in such circumstances to say without a pang, "He must increase, but I must decrease," and the task is difficult in proportion as the man who is being supplanted feels that he deserves to be so. Saul must have felt that it was his own lack of faith and obedience that had alienated the confidence of Israel, but he was only mortified, not humbled, by the consciousness. In such a state of mind he could not see David's rise without that painful sense of his own loss which constitutes jealousy. The step from jealousy to envy is soon taken. When impatience of rivalry developes into hatred of the rival the more deadly demon of envy has taken hold of the man, and when he yields himself to its sway no crime is too great for him to commit. A man may invite into his home a visitor of questionable character, and offer him a seat at his board and at his fireside, and feel confident that no harm will come of it. But he may one day find that he has been entertaining his murderer. It behoves us to beware whom we admit into our house, but it is far more important that we should beware what feelings we harbour in our minds, and many a man who has at first only admitted jealousy as a passing guest has found to his cost that he has by so doing given place to a devil that has murdered his happiness, and perhaps ruined his character entirely. It was so with Saul. He had already taken more than one downward step, and now, by yielding to jealousy and envy, he descends lower still. For envy soon transforms him into a murderer in intention, though not in action, and henceforward gives him no rest, but hurries him on from one desperate act to another, until he becomes his own murderer on the mountains of Gilboa. Probably no human life whose history has been recorded reads to us so plainly as Saul's the terribly fatal consequences that may be involved in the first departure from the path of right. The man who, in his early public life, revealed a noble indifference to personal wrongs (chaps. x. 27, xi. 13), became in after years a miserable slave to envy, and allowed this passion so to rule him that the one aim of his life became the murder of an innocent man and of one whom he knew was especially honoured and approved by God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In the character-pictures which it represents to us (as is clear in the history of Saul and David), Holy Scripture never exhibits a pause in religious-moral life, but always holds up the mighty "Either." . . . . "Or," which man has to decide,—either forward on the way in which man walks at the hand of God with giving up of his own will and humble obedience to the will of God, or backwards with uncheckable step, when man puts God's guidance from him, and, following his own will, suffers not God's will to be accomplished in, on, and through himself.—*Lange's Commentary.*

We can scarcely conceive of a single trying situation in life in which David, at some period of his earthly course, did not find himself placed. Even for his own sake, that he might not be too much elevated by the abundant favours that were heaped upon him, he stood in need of being continually reminded of his dependence on Him who dwells in the high and holy place, and with those who are of broken and contrite spirit. Besides this, however, David was to become, even for thousands of years, a beloved and comforting companion to the oppressed and the miserable of every kind, and therefore from him must no cup of affliction pass untasted. Through what depths of affliction might not his way have led him? But into every darkness which cast its shadow around him the light of the opened heavens penetrated; and after every storm which raged against him there followed the gentle breathings of Divine consolation, that all his followers on their pathway of sorrow might thereby be encouraged. Thus is he qualified for being *the* harper for all afflicted and oppressed souls, just as he once was for the king of Israel; and to this day it is true, that wherever the melody of his psalms sounds and echoes in the heart, there the shadows of sorrow and sadness are scattered, and courage, and peace, and joy return and take possession of the soul.—*Krummacher.*

We may gather up some lessons for our modern life from this ancient chapter of sacred history.

In the first place we may see the evil of centring our thoughts and plans entirely on ourselves. This was the root of Saul's misery. He was one of the most ardent *selfists* that ever lived. He had made self his god. He looked only and always at his own interests. "How will this affect me?" was his constant question as each new event transpired; and whensoever he imagined that he was to be injured by any other man's elevation or advancement, he was stirred up to seek his ruin. Thus he was ever moody and unhappy. He hugged himself to his heart, and as a punishment God left him to himself, and no companionship could have been more miserable.

We may see here, in the second place, that the servant of God may expect to encounter adversity in an early stage of his career. David was not to be cradled for his future work in the lap of luxury. He was "to learn in suffering what he taught in song." He was not to be like "a bird on a bough, singing forth free and offhand, never knowing the troubles of other men;" but, led through trials of his own, he was stimulated and inspired to sing of them in strains which, because they came "from the heart of man, speak to all men's hearts."

Lastly, we may learn here that the wisest course in time of danger is to do faithfully our daily duty, and leave our case with God. David went about his work, behaved himself wisely, and let God take care of him. On other occasions, as we shall see, he had sometimes recourse to questionable expedients and sinful practices, for self-protection; but in the present instance he walked steadily on in the right path.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Ver. 6. A patriotic celebration of the victory in Israel was certainly now in every respect appropriate; but it

ought to have been of another altogether different and more worthy sort than that now celebrated by the people. The songs of praise ought to have ascended before all to the Lord, who, for this end, made use of the humble, unarmed shepherd boy as his instrument, that he might so much the more make it distinctly appear that it was his arm of almighty power which had saved Israel. The people mistook this, and they idolised the instrument. But is not this very error, which lamentably proves a deep estrangement from God, a conspicuous feature of the present generation, which has invented the expression, "hero-worship," and among whom we not seldom see this deification of men rise up even to madness? Well and good: let men celebrate their heroes, immortalise their memory in monuments, weave laurel crowns for all who have made themselves serviceable to the common weal, or who have extended the empire of elevating and salutory ideas by the power of their creative mental endowments,—only let them not forget first to give praise to the Father of Spirits for all that is great and noble and rich in blessing, which the children of men accomplish; for from him cometh down every good and every perfect gift; and, above all others, let them render to him, in prostrate humility, the homage which is his due; let them keep in moderation the rendering of praise to mortal men.—*Krummacher.*

Ver 9. For every great and good work a man must expect to be envied by his neighbour; no distinction or pre-eminence can be so unexceptionally obtained, but it will expose the possessor to slander or malice, and perhaps to the most fatal consequences. But such trials are very useful to those who love God; they serve as a counterpoise to the honour put upon them, and check the growth of pride and attachment to the world; they exercise them to faith, patience, meekness, and communion with God; they give them a fair opportunity of exemplifying the amiable nature of true godliness, by acting with wisdom and propriety in the most difficult circumstances; they make way for increasing experience of the Lord's faithfulness, in restraining their enemies, raising them up friends, and affording them His gracious protection.—*Scott.*

Ver. 10. "Saul," says the history, "betook himself to prophesying; *i.e.*, there appeared in him the dark image of that agitation under which the prophets poured forth their discourses and sayings when overpowered by the might of the *Holy* Spirit, which for the moment raised them, if not above their own consciousness, at least above their understanding. Saul wandered and raged about his palace like one bereft of reason, and saw in his unbelieving imagination, full of suspicions, visions which at one time made him tremble and shudder, and at another hurried him on to madness and wild outbreaks of passion.

Were it granted us, in our own immediate circles of society, to look everywhere behind the curtain, how often would such-like scenes meet our view—scenes of wild overflowings of a wounded sense of honour, or of unbridled anger because of some loss sustained, or of burning and heart-consuming envy, so that we could not forbear to use the expression "demoniacal" as fittingly designating such paroxysms.—*Krummacher.*

Ver. 12. One would have thought rather, that David should have been afraid of Saul, because the devil was so strong with him, than that Saul should be afraid of David, because the Lord was with him; yet we find all the fear in Saul of David, none in David of Saul. Hatred and fear are ordinary companions. David had wisdom and faith to dispel his fears; Saul had nothing but infidelity, and dejected, self-condemned, distempered thoughts, which must needs nourish them; yet Saul could not fear any hurt from David, whom he found so loyal and serviceable; he fears only too much good unto David; and the envious fear is much more than the distrustful. —*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER XIX.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"And Saul spake . . . . that they should kill David."** Rather, "*that he intended to kill David.*"

Ver. 2. **"Until the morning."** **Rather, "*in the morning.*"**

Ver. 3. **"In the field."** "David was to conceal himself in the field, near to where Jonathan would converse with his father about him; not that he might hear the conversation in his hiding-place, but that Jonathan might immediately report to him the result of his conversation, without there being any necessity for his going far away from his father, so as to excite suspicion that he was in league with David." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 5. **"He did put his life in his hand."** "The Hebrew word means the palm or hollow of the hand—the hand as receptacle, not as instrument. Perhaps alluding to David's hand which swung the sling against the giant, upon the firmness and certainty of which his life depended." *(Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 9. **"The evil spirit from the Lord (Jehovah)."** "While this evil spirit is in ch. xvi. 15 and ch. xviii. 10 referred to *Elohim*, the Deity in general *Jehovah* is here affirmed to be its sender, because Saul's condition, which was *there* only ascribed in general to a higher Divine causality in respect to his person, is *here* regarded as a judgment of the *Covenant-God* of Israel on the reprobate *king* who hardens his heart against God." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 11. **"To slay him in the morning."** "We may guess that only the fear of alarming the town, and of rousing the populace to rescue their favourite hero, prevented Saul from directing them to break into the house and slay David there." *(Kitto.)*

Ver. 13. **"Image."** Literally, the teraphim as in Gen. xxxv. 2, evidently household gods which were still in use to some extent among the Israelites. See Judges xvii. 5; xviii. 14, etc. "The plural here represents a single image which it seems must have had the human form, at least as to head and face, though the size may have varied since Rachel concealed it under the camel-saddle." *(Erdmann.)* **"Pillow."** The word so rendered occurs only here, and is derived from the Hebrew verb *Cabar*, to *plait* or *braid*. Hence it means something *bound together* or *woven*, evidently a portion of the bed-furniture, which Michal so arranged as to make her deception more complete.

Ver 17. Michal evidently here pretends that her own life would have been in danger from her husband if she had not allowed him to escape.

Ver. 18. **"Naioth."** "This word signifies *dwellings*, but it is here in a certain sense a proper name applied to the *coenobium* of the pupils of the prophets who had assembled round Samuel in the neighbourhood of Ramah. The plural form points to the fact that this coenobium consisted of a considerable number of dwelling-places or houses, connected together by a hedge or wall." *(Kiel.)*

Ver. 20. **"Prophets."** "It is to be noted that we have here *prophets* who in inspired discourse give forth their inner life, filled with the Holy Ghost, not *sons* of the prophets as in 2 Kings iv. 38, etc., who as scholars and learners sit at the feet of their master and teacher. The prophetic community here, therefore, under Samuel as *head*, is not yet a prophetic *school* to educate young men for the prophetic calling, but is a prophetic *seminary* in which, under Samuel's guidance, in an externally strictly ordered, yet internally free association, the prophetic powers are practised and strengthened, mutually incite, nourish, and further one another, and the prophetic charisma finds ever new nourishment and new growth by this common holy discipline." *(Erdmann.)* See also notes on Chap. X. **"They also prophesied."** "The condition of Saul's messengers is that of ecstatic ravishment, into which they were brought by the overpowering might of the inspired song, or word of the prophets." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 22. **"A great well,"** etc. Rather, "*The great cistern,*" some well-known spot in a locality now unknown.

Ver. 23. **"Prophesied until he came,"** etc. "The difference between Saul and his messengers was simply that the inspiration came on him as he was approaching the residence of the prophet, and that it attained a higher grade, and lasted longer, completely suppressing his self-consciousness." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 24. **"Lay naked,"** *i.e.*, divested of his robe or upper garment. "The throwing off of the clothing was the effect of the heat of the body produced by internal excitement." *(Erdmann.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—7.

JONATHAN'S INTERCESSION FOR DAVID.

I. The man who is related both to the offended person and to the offender is specially qualified to be a mediator between them. If a man would be a successful intercessor he must be acquainted with the nature and disposition of him with whom he intercedes, and he must have sympathy with the person for whom he intercedes. If he is linked by the ties of blood or friendship to one or both parties, he will know much better than a stranger how to frame his petition—he will be acquainted with the arguments which will be most influential with the one on behalf of the other, and his own relationship to both and his consequent interest in both will of itself form a reason why his suit should be regarded. David was fortunate in having for his intercessor the man who, above all others in Israel, was most fitted to mediate between him and Saul. His love for David had brought him into such near fellowship with him that he was qualified to be a judge of the aims and motives which actuated him and to pronounce him innocent or guilty, and he was so near akin to Saul that he could approach him with freedom and without fear of being suspected of having any motive prejudicial to his father's honour and welfare. Hence his appeal was listened to, and David was, at least for a time, restored to favour. The relation of Christ to men on the one hand, and to His Divine Father on the other, constitutes His special and peculiar qualification to be the Mediator between God and man. Having been made like unto His brethren, He can sympathise with human frailties and understand human needs, and as the only-begotten of the Father he can have access to Him as no finite creature can.

II. Those who truly love will find that in human life occasions of proving their love will not be wanting. So many and so great are human needs, and so varied the experiences through which most men are called to pass, that those who love us will often find opportunity of showing their unselfish regard, and of proving that they are friends *indeed* by being friends *in need*. And if the love is a reality it will be equal to the demand made upon it, and will rejoice in being able, by self-denial, to help its object in the day of adversity. Jonathan had made a covenant with David in the day when the young shepherd was the hero of the hour, and when Saul himself looked favourably upon him; but now the clouds are beginning to gather around him, and Jonathan finds an occasion to show his love in a manner which involves much more self-denial than the giving of "his garments even to his sword and his bow." It needed much courage for even a son to face a man like Saul and to assert the innocence of him who had now begun to be an object of suspicion and jealousy. When men are so entirely governed by their passions and moods it is a dangerous thing to tell them that they are in the wrong, especially if they are in the possession of so much irresponsible power as an Eastern monarch is. Yet this Jonathan dared to do not only on this occasion but on others when his father's temper was more implacable than even now, and he thereby proved that his love for his friend was real and very strong.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

How good it is to hear such words as these spoken by Jonathan, which, in their peaceful, gentle tone, their reverential utterance, contradicting in nothing the duty of a child, and in their noble purpose breathe already something of the spirit of New Testament times. And yet, as John at a later period testifies in his Gospel, "The Holy Ghost was not yet given,"

—a truth which we ought particularly to keep in mind in all the opinions and estimates we form of the morals of the men of Old Testament times. The hereditary nature of man, fallen in Adam, had then allowed to it a much wider scope than in the post-pentecostal days of the New Covenant. The natural affections and passions shot forth, when once they broke through the barriers of the Divine commandments, into monstrous, gigantic manifestations and wild forms, which may be compared to the luxurious growth of the primeval forests. Saul, with his colossal hatred, and his jealousy breathing forth fire and flames, may be regarded as a witness of this fact. . . . Yet it is undoubtedly true that, even during the Mosaic economy, individual personages appeared like shining meteors, lovely and rich in promise, who present themselves before us as prophetic types of believers of a future age. To this class belonged Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and certainly now also our Jonathan. The example of disinterested friendship, rooting itself in love to God, which the latter presents to us, remains at least as a fitting model for Christian times, wherein even its equal is not frequently to be found.—*Krummacher.*

Ver. 6. How could Saul say, he should die, whom he could accuse of nothing but faithfulness? Why should he design him to death, which had given life to all Israel? Ofttimes wicked men's judgments are forced to yield unto that truth against which their affections maintain a rebellion. Even the foulest hearts do sometimes entertain good motions: like as, on the contrary, the holiest souls give way sometimes to the suggestions of evil. The flashes of lightning may be discerned in the darkest prisons. But if good thoughts look into a wicked heart, they stay not there; as those that like not their lodging, they are soon gone: hardly anything distinguishes betwixt good and evil, but continuance. The light that shines into a holy heart is constant, like that of the sun, which keeps due times, and varies not his course for any of these sublunary occasions.—*Bishop Hall.*

Draw from this the extreme danger of trifling with the name and attributes of God—of using imprecations and oaths, as mere expletives in ordinary conversation, without either reverence or meaning . . . An irreverent familiarity with sacred things, as in all other instances, is but one step removed from contempt. Such, unhappily, was the case with Saul. "As the Lord liveth," was an expression so frequently on his lips, that, it may be feared, its solemn import was soon but little felt or understood. Hence, we perceive in the chapter before us with what facility he disregarded the obligation of his oath, when exposed to temptation . . . . He who is not afraid thus solemnly to trifle with his Maker, will not fear to violate the most sacred obligations towards his neighbour . . . Beware, then, of destroying, or weakening in any degree, your reverence for God, which is the foundation of all religion and all morality. Be assured, there is no more certain way of effecting this, than a profane and inconsiderate use of His holy name.—*Lindsay.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8–17.

David's First Flight.

I. Human transgressors are surrounded by divinely raised barriers intended to prevent their departure from the right way. A soldier weary of the hardships of the camp forms a plan to desert his regiment, and thus to expose himself to dishonour and to punishment. But all around him are stationed sentinels who stand to prevent him from doing what would ruin all his prospects for life. It is well for him if the thought of the cold steel which encompasses

him leads him to dismiss the idea from his mind—if the opposition which he knows he should meet with makes him pause and allow the purpose to die. But should he persist he will not succeed in making good his escape without encountering many a bayonet and bullet, each of which is a witness against him bearing testimony that he is a transgressor against martial law. In like manner God puts sentinels in the path of men which are intended to keep them from breaking through moral laws, and by the opposition which they offer to transgression to convince them of the self-destroying nature of sin. First and foremost stands the voice of conscience, and then, it may be, the pleadings of family affection, the arguments of reason and even the warnings of self-interest. Saul was surrounded by such divinely raised barriers, which he broke down one after another. His conscience and his reason echoing the remonstrance of Jonathan, had but lately stood across his path, and for a time had turned him from his purpose. But he had silenced them again, and now the opposition of his daughter, like another sentinel, rises up before him, and hinders him from staining his hands with innocent blood. Michal's interposition surely reminded him that the man whose life he sought was not an obscure subject and a stranger but one whom his own act had made the husband of his daughter and a member of the royal household, and therefore one who, from family and political interests, had a claim upon him even if he was not open to influence from higher motives. Each admonition and hindrance which Saul encountered was a witness against him, and warned him that he was pursuing a path of self-destruction.

II. Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake may serve God better by fleeing than by fighting. It costs a courageous man much more to flee than to fight, and yet there are times and circumstances when the voice of duty commands the former rather than the latter. The commander may feel a strong desire to encounter the enemy, and yet he may feel that a retreat for the present may ensure a victory with less loss of life in the future. Or he may long to attack a certain stronghold and yet he may feel assured that if he delay, it will shortly be surrendered without bloodshed. In both cases he will be acting wrongly if he allows his physical courage and martial ardour to get the better of his humanity. It will be better to expose himself to the charge of cowardice than to do that which will be least for the honour of his God and his country. Up to this period of his life David had never turned his back upon an enemy, or retreated when exposed to personal danger, excepting so far as to avoid the javelin of Saul. It must have been harder for him to flee with the help of a woman than it would have been to remain and face the messengers of the king. But he doubtless felt that the course which was least in accordance with his feelings was most in accordance with his duty. If he had come forward in open opposition to Saul he could scarcely have failed to rally many friends to his side, but a civil war might have been the result. He therefore chose the course which, though more apparently humiliating to himself, was most conducive to the welfare of his country, and therefore most pleasing to God. In all cases of a similar nature—whenever a servant of God finds himself the subject of unjust treatment—it becomes him to consider not his own personal feelings first, nor even his personal and present reputation merely, but the welfare of his country and the honour of his God.

III. Even good men are sometimes under obligations to unscrupulous and godless persons. Michal was destitute of the pure and lofty motives which governed David, yet at this time she was the instrument of his deliverance. In bringing about the end she desired she did not hesitate to endeavour to clear herself at the expense of her husband, and thus to deprive herself of all claim

to our admiration and sympathy. Yet, as David was then situated, he was compelled to be indebted to her exertions, and to let her misrepresentation of his character go unchallenged. There is more than one way of testifying our regard for a friend in a position similar to that in which David was then placed. We may be bold enough openly to avow our affection for them, and take the consequences of so doing. Or we may prefer to show our love by sharing their misfortunes—by casting in our lot with theirs, and being willing to fare as they fare. Or we may only have so low a regard for them as to be willing to serve them only so far as we can do it without involving ourselves in trouble for their sakes. This last kind of regard was all apparently that Michal had for David. Jonathan did not scruple openly to seek to save his friend's life, and to risk his father's displeasure in so doing. Michal was willing to save his life if she could do it without exposing herself to Saul's anger; she loved him enough to aid his escape, but not enough to take the blame upon herself. She did not even love him enough to share his exile, although she probably knew that he was the anointed king of Israel; she had some regard for his life, but none for his honour, or she would not have charged the absent hero with threatening to become her murderer (ver. 17), and so have shielded herself under his blackened reputation. It mattered not to her that she was thus giving Saul some pretext for seeking his life—that she was thus wounding her husband in a more deadly manner than her father's sword would have done. The meanness of the act shows us to what a contemptible instrument a noble man may sometimes be indebted for a service. Michal's conduct, in contrast with that of her brother, gave David just ground to say in after days, "*Thy* love to me was wonderful, *passing the love of women*" (2 Sam. i. 26).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

As the crystal vessel, though cast into its proper and permanent form, is unfit for use until it has been recommitted to the furnace, and, by the process of *annealing*, adapted for the rough process of ordinary usage, so the character of David, elevated and beautiful although it had already appeared, was as yet too soft for the strain and pressure of a royal position; years had to be spent in annealing it. . . . The great purpose of God, in David's early trials, seems to have been to develop and mature those gifts and graces that were to fit him for a royal position. . . . 1. In this view, first of all it was most necessary that the spirit of *trust in God*, and all the graces depending on it and derived from it, should be exercised and nurtured to the highest measure of strength and endurance. . . . . and no discipline could have been better fitted than David's for impressing this lesson. . . 2. Another important grace which David's early trials seem designed to promote was the spirit of *calm self-government* under circumstances the most trying and agitating. The germ of this grace (as of the former) was exhibited in the combat with Goliath; but it too required to be strengthened into a steady, constant habit, ere he was qualified to hold the reins of government. . . . 3. The close and painful contact into which he was brought in these early trials with his predecessor, Saul, was obviously designed to serve a very important purpose. The same trials endured at the hand of another man would not have had the same effect. . . . If anything could have made him shudder at the thought of a ruler abandoned by God, and driving at nothing but the gratification of his own base passions, it was being himself the victim of those passions, receiving in his own person the blows aimed by Saul's ungovernable fury.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 16. The falsehood of Michal, by which she deceived her father Saul,

was a retribution on him; it was the fruit of his own evil example, teaching her to practise deceit by his own acts: see chap. xviii. 17, 19, 20, 21. His falsehood and treachery recoiled on himself, as Laban's falsehood and treachery against Jacob recoiled on Laban himself by the conduct of his daughters to him (Gen. xxxi. 14–20, 35). Saul had cheated David of his wife, as Laban had cheated Jacob of his wife. The daughters of Laban and Saul practised against their fathers the lessons of deceit which they had learned at their own homes.—*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 17. But how shall Michal answer this mockage unto her furious father? Hitherto she hath done like David's wife; now she begins to be Saul's daughter: "He said to me, Let me go, or else I will kill thee." She, whose wit had delivered her husband from the sword of her father, now turns the edge of her father's wrath from herself to her husband. His absence made her presume of his safety. If Michal had not been of Saul's plot, he had never expostulated with her in those terms: "Why hast thou let mine enemy escape?" Neither had she framed that answer, "He said, Let me go" . . . . As she loved her husband better than her father, so she loved herself better than her husband: she saved her husband by a wile; and now she saves herself by a lie, and loses half the thank of her deliverance by an officious slander. Her act was good, but she wants courage to maintain it, and therefore seeks to the weak shelter of untruth. Those that do good offices, not out of conscience, but good nature or civility, if they meet an affront of danger, seldom come off cleanly, but are ready to catch at all excuses, though base, though injurious; because their grounds are not strong enough to bear them out in suffering for that which they have well done.—*Bishop Hall.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSES 18 and 19.

David's Visit to Ramah.

I. The godly naturally seek the society of the godly in times of trouble. A desire to conform to the will of God is the basis of all true godliness, and those who are ruled by this desire are bound together by a common bond and are often involved in a common persecution. Under such circumstances it is natural and wise for them to seek each other's society that they may strengthen each other by mutual sympathy and help, and especially that those who have had much experience may encourage and advise those who have but lately entered upon life. Sailors who in tempestuous weather put into harbour are likely to find sympathy and help from veteran seamen who once themselves ploughed the ocean—while they listen to the tale of their experience they gain fresh courage to meet new storms and perhaps valuable hints as to the best means of steering their vessel in dangerous waters. The common desire to serve their common God had created a strong tie between the aged prophet Samuel and the youthful warrior David, and when the latter found himself compelled by Saul's envy to flee from home, it was natural he should seek the abode of one who had been driven into retirement by the same godless man. We can imagine what help David would gain from his aged friend at this time—how Samuel would strengthen his faith and animate his courage by reminding him of the word of the Lord which had come to him as God's prophet in past days (chap. xvi. 1), and how he would likewise, out of the experience of a long public life, give David much valuable counsel concerning not only the future immediately before him, but touching that more distant day when he should do longer be an outcast fleeing for his life but the ruler of Israel. During his short stay at Ramah he was strengthened for the long sojourn in the wilderness that came after, and he doubtless fully realised the truth that, "as iron

sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." And in such times of communion the gain is never on one side only. If the younger are helped and instructed by the elder, the elder are cheered and comforted by the younger. The veteran servants of God are gladdened by the energy and fervour of the younger men, and rejoice when they see others rising up to fill the places which they once occupied. We may be sure that Samuel gladly welcomed his young friend even although the visit was brought about by painful circumstances. In his retirement he doubtless often still grieved over the failure of his hopes concerning Saul, but when he saw David he would be cheered by the certainty that here was one who would not disappoint his expectations but would prove himself a faithful ruler of Israel.

II. When the godly find each other thus mutually helpful one great end of the existence of the visible church is attained. One great aim of every wise human father is to make his children mutually helpful to each other. Indeed one great reason for the existence of the family seems to be the formation of such strong and tender ties between the brothers and sisters, as shall enable them by the love which they bear to each other to lighten each other's burdens as they journey through life. Those who are the objects of such love know well how often it has cheered them in the day of adversity and nerved them to face fresh trials and perplexities. And the children of God ought to look upon themselves as part of the one great "family in heaven and earth," and to count it their duty to extend their sympathy and counsel to every afflicted member of that family. For this is indeed one of the great reasons why God's children are required to form themselves into a community, and are required to make public profession of their faith in him. By so doing they become known to each other and are enabled to animate each other's love and stimulate each other to persevere in the ways of godliness.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Besides this intercourse with Samuel, the pursuits of the sons of the prophets, alike in their practice of music and poetry, and in the study of the Word of God, were just such as David would most thoroughly enjoy, and as would most materially tend to soothe his spirit after the trials through which he had just passed, and brace it for the difficulties which lay before him. I do not presume to fix either the date or the authorship of all the productions which have been brought together into the one book of the Psalms, but if the 119th Psalm came from the pen of David, as multitudes believe, then I do not wonder that many have connected its composition with his residence in the school of the prophets at Naioth. The calm in which he then found himself, and the studies which he then prosecuted, might well have led his musings in the direction of that alphabetic ode, while there are in it not a few expressions which, to say the least, may have particular reference to the dangers out of which he had so recently escaped, and by which he was still threatened. Such, for example, are the following: "Princes also did sit and speak against me; but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes." "The proud have had me in derision, yet have I not declined from thy law." "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me; yet thy commandments are my delights." Then, in regard to his present enjoyment, we may quote these lines: "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold or silver;" and in reference to God's dealings with him, he says, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." *Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20–24.

SAUL AMONG THE PROPHETS.

I. Institutions for the study of the oracles of God are the outcome of human need. Each individual man is a creature of manifold needs. Being a compound of matter and mind, possessing a material and a spiritual nature, he has many wants—bodily wants, intellectual wants, and moral wants. There is a wide field open, therefore, to those who devote their lives to ministering to his wants. They may make it their business to feed or clothe his body, and in doing so their special object is to supply that material which shall be best adapted for the purpose; or they may make bodily health the object of their aim, and spend their lives in studying how to promote or restore it. Others study man's intellectual needs, and endeavour to find out how best to develop his mental powers, or to satisfy his mental appetites. But man is more than body and intellect, he is also *conscience*, and unless he finds satisfaction for this moral part of his being, he goes through life with his deepest need unsatisfied. It is only natural therefore that some men should feel called upon to devote their lives and energies to endeavouring to show their fellow creatures how this deepest and most pressing of all their many needs can be met. And as there are institutions whose object it is to fit men to be useful to others in respect of their bodily and intellectual wants, it seems fit and proper that there should be similar institutions calculated to render men more fit to deal with the moral wants of their fellows. If there are schools for the training of bodily healers, and for those who are to educate the intellectual part of man, there ought surely to be schools for those who desire to be instrumental in healing and in training his moral nature. Such institutions seem to be the natural outcome of human need. The one object of study in such communities is, of course, the only book which can meet man's spiritual wants—that book which contains a revelation of the Divine will and purpose concerning him. Other things are studied, but all tending to the one end, that of throwing light upon the Divine oracles. As the schools of the prophets found in Israel were born of the human needs of that earlier day, so our modern religious training institutions are the outcome of a felt present need. And although they differ greatly in many respects they agree in having for their aim the study of the Word of God, and the diffusion of its truths among mankind, so that the needs of each soul may be met.

II. Such institutions ought to be places in which the operation of the Spirit of God is very manifest. Men who have to deal with this greatest need of fallen humanity have to encounter obstacles which are not met with by those who seek to supply the needs of man's lower nature. Men are willing and eager to satisfy their bodily appetites, and to be healed of their bodily diseases, and many are glad to obtain food and training for their minds, but the majority of men are indifferent as to their spiritual needs and turn with aversion from any effort made to heal their moral diseases. Hence those who essay to labour for this end must be aided by a power which is more than human, even by that power of the spirit of God which is mighty in convincing of sin and in healing the sinner. Every prophet of God, in whatever age he lives, must be able, in some degree, to adopt the words of the greatest and the Divine Prophet when He said, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*" (Luke iv. 18, 19). Without this mighty reinforcement he will not prevail against the natural opposition of the human heart to God and goodness. This mighty spirit evidently rested in

a special and remarkable manner upon the school of the prophets over which Samuel presided, it worked in and through the first New Testament prophets in a similar manner, and without the influence of that same Divine Person no man, however richly he may be endowed in other respects, can be instrumental in communicating spiritual life to others. While, therefore, all godly men in all ages need and possess the help of the spirit of God, the sons of the prophets need His help in a special manner, and there is every reason for them to expect to receive it if the conditions for its reception be fulfilled.

III. Men may be wrought upon by the Spirit of God without becoming morally better. This was not the first time that Saul had been found among the prophets, and had been the subject of that supernatural influence which was present with them. On the first occasion it seems likely that he was a willing subject of this Divine influence, and that he gladly yielded himself to its power. That first endowment was probably an earnest of what might have been bestowed on him had he continued willing to be guided by the Holy Ghost. He would then have been from time to time favoured with these special manifestations of the Divine presence in such a way as would have enlightened his spiritual understanding, and altogether exalted his moral nature and made him more and more fit to be the representative of God to the people of Israel. But such had not been the case, and this last exercise of the Spirit of God upon him seems to have been at least without the consent of his will and possibly against it. It has rather the aspect of a visitation of Divine judgment than of Divine favour, and is a solemn illustration of the truth that even this great gift of the Father of Lights may be bestowed in a certain form and degree, without its receiver becoming a renewed man. "*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*" (Matt. vii. 22, 23).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 20, 21. By these "prophesyings" we are not to understand, as we are already aware, a foretelling of future things, but a pouring forth of the heart under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, in lively songs of praise of God, and of His wonderful works. With anointed lips, and with an animated oratory, they praised the mighty deeds through which Jehovah had from of old made Himself glorious to His people. In responsive chorus they sang—with the harmonious accompaniment of harps, flutes, cymbals, and trumpets—sacred songs to the honour of God, and called down in earnest prayers upon themselves and all the people the blessings of the Almighty, and the fire-streams of His Spirit. From time to time it pleased God, in the days of the Old Covenant, to bring into prominence the exalted life of His own children in contrast with the children of this world, abandoned by the Spirit, and unable to rise above the earth, in so unmistakable and overpowering a manner, that in view of it even the most blinded among the people might gain some apprehension of the depth to which they had fallen from the elevated height of their former calling. At the same time, from these inspired ones there went forth among the people a light to show in what sense the Lord, by the coming of the Messiah—for whom they were then waiting—would create a "*new thing in the earth*," and what was meant by the regeneration and purifying of the world, which would be brought about by the advent of the Messiah. . . . . Even among the roughest and wildest spirits in Israel, the religious feeling was in only a few instances so completely dead that it could not be kindled up out of its

ashes, although only temporarily, when touched by the right spark. There are even at the present day, in our own fatherland, districts of the Church where almost a similar thing may be said of those who belong to it. In times of great spiritual awakening, or even of only solemn Church festivals, one sees persons who, on account of their spiritual dulness and their thorough worldliness of character, were believed to be incapable of being lifted up into the kingdom of God, suddenly glow with devotion and with zeal for the service of God when brought into fellowship with believers. This sudden religious elevation to which they are thus drawn along with them, shows itself, as a rule, to be by no means steadfast and enduring. But they also "prophesy" a while with the congregation of the saints, and perhaps even *rise higher* than many of them, in the heat and enthusiasm of their religious profession. It not seldom happens even that they who are only passing travellers, when they breathe the air of such a district, feel themselves, before they are aware of it, deeply interested in religious and ecclesiastical matters. Moreover, the religious elevation of mind on the part of the royal messengers at Naioth may be attributed partly to the appearance of the aged Samuel, the man of God, known and highly venerated throughout the whole land. It is enough that at that time they could not venture on any account to rush with violence into the midst of of the solemn scenes to which they had come. How could they by any possibility lay hands on him whom Saul hated in so unrighteous a manner, and who was so visibly under the protecting care of God,—the young hero by the side of Samuel?—*Krummacher.*

Ver. 24. Mark here, how men who are themselves godless observe and criticise the characters of those who join themselves with the people of God. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" said the wits of Israel, when they heard of what occurred at Naioth. Now this might have been as honourable to Saul, as it came to be dishonourable to him, if only he had in his after history proved himself sincerely resolved to do the will of God. Thus, when we say of another Saul, "Is Paul also among the apostles?" we mean no reproach to the man of Tarsus, but only desire thereby to magnify the riches of divine grace, which transformed him from a persecutor of the Church into a preacher of the Gospel; and had this occasion been the turning-point in the history of the King of Israel, as the prostration at Damascus was the crisis in the life of the Christian apostle, the proverb before us would have been one of honour, and not of disgrace. Unhappily, however, by his after conduct Saul gave occasion to men to speak of his insincerity and wickedness, and so, "Saul among the prophets" is, even yet, jeeringly said by us, when we mean to indicate that a godless, Christless man has found his way into the membership or ministry of the Church. Now this proverb, thus understood, is two-edged. It speaks to those who are as yet outside of the Church, and says to them, "If you are not really and truly Christ's; if you do not love the Lord and desire to serve him, then do not seek to enter the Church." But it speaks also to those who are within, and says to them, "If in your hearts you are conscious that you are none of Christ's, and if in your conduct you are dishonouring his name, then go out from the Church. It is not for such as you; and your continuance in it will only make men say, 'Is Saul among the prophets?' They who have named the name of Christ should depart from iniquity."—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

In reviewing the narrative over which we have come, we are impressed with the proof, which is here furnished, of the diversified resources which Jehovah has at command for the protection of His people. Again and again Saul attempts to take David's life, but always without success; and each time the means by which David was delivered are different. At first he is defended by

God's blessing on his own valour against the Philistines; then he is indebted for his safety to the mediation of Jonathan; then to the agency of Michal; and finally to the miraculous work of God's own Holy Spirit. In the subsequent portion of the history, we shall find that the same principle holds, and that in each new peril he is preserved by some new instrumentality. When God purposes to protect a man, He is at no loss for the means of carrying out His design. He may find them in what seems to us mortals the most unexpected places, and they may work in what appears to us to be a very strange—it may be, also, a very sinful manner; yet the purpose is accomplished, while yet the liberty of the different agents is not infringed.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Ver. 24. In connection with chap x. 11. There has been some moment, some one fleeting moment, in the life of every man, even the most thoughtless, when he has had dreams of better things, when he has heard the voices of the prophets coming with their harp and their tabret down the hill, when he has joined their company and caught their strains. There may have been a time when it has been said of him, "What! is he too among the prophets?" Has he found that life is real. . . . . That hour, that moment, was *the* hour, *the* moment of thy life, friend and brother. To *that* God would raise, assimilate the whole of it. Oh! do not let the sluggish turbid current of your ordinary days seem to you that which truly represent to you what you are, what you are able to be. . . . . but if you should have succeeded in quenching that voice of love which you once heard speaking in your heart, and now can hear nothing but hoarse and dissonant voices of evil omen,—oh yet be sure that the spirit of God does not desert the work of His own hands, that He is still hovering about the habitation in which He desires to dwell. And if, when you meet with old friends from whom you have been long estranged, there should come back something of the youthful impulse, some of those heart yearnings and songs of hope you poured forth then, though mixed with turbulence and confusion, and hardly to be distinguished from madness, yet the question may be asked again, "Is he too among the prophets?" and it is a God will answer the question as it was not answered before, if you desire not the power of the prophets, but their obedience, not that you may speak inspired words, but that you may have the humble and contrite heart which He does not despise.—*Maurice.*

CHAPTER XX.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—**Ver. 1. "And David fled,"** while Saul was still under the power of the prophetic influence. "Nothing could be a better evidence of his innocence than his thus putting himself in Jonathan's power. Perhaps something passed between Samuel and Saul on the subject, since it appears from verses 5, 25, 27, that Saul expected David at the feast of the new moon." *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 2. "Why should my father hide this thing from me?" This remark supposes that the intimate relation between Jonathan and David had been concealed, as far as possible, from Saul." *(Erdmann.)* "Jonathan, it would seem, clung to a hope that the extraordinary scene at Naioth might have wrought a sanctified improvement on Saul's temper and feelings." *(Jamieson.)* Or, "he might regard the late attempt on David as the result of a new but temporary access of rage, and remembering his distinct oath in his lucid intervals, might suppose that he would not in a quiet state of mind resolve on and execute such a murder. *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 3. "Moreover:" rather "again."

Ver. 5. "To-morrow is the new moon," etc. "This request implies that Saul gave a feast at the new moon, and therefore that the new moon was not merely a religious festival, according to the law in Numb. x. 10, xxviii. 11, 15, but that it was kept as a civil festival also, and in the latter character for two days; as we may infer both from the fact that David reckoned to the third evening, *i.e.*, the evening of the third day from the day then present . . . . it does not follow, that because Saul supposed that David might have absented himself the first day on account of Levitical uncleanness, therefore the royal feast was a sacrificial meal. It was evidently contrary to social propriety to take part in a public feast in a state of Levitical uncleanness, even though it is not expressly forbidden in the law." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 6. "A yearly sacrifice." "In the then disorganised condition of public worship, to which David himself first gave regular form, family usages of this sort, after the manner of other nations, had established themselves, which were contrary to the prescriptions concerning the unity of Divine worship." *(Von Gerlach.)*

Ver. 8. **"Covenant of the Lord."** "Because it was not only made with invocation of the Lord's name, but also had its deepest ground and origin in God, and its consecration in their life-like communion with God." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 11. "Come, let us go out," etc. "The scene of this memorable conference was," as Porter describes it (*Handbook*, p. 324), "a shallow valley between Gibeah (Tell el Fûlil) and Nob, breaking down on the east in rocky declivities into Wady Suleim. Behind some of the rocks in it David could easily lie hid, and yet see Jonathan descending from the city above." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 12. "O Lord God of Israel." This is not a prayer, but an invocation—a calling upon God to witness to his sincerity.

Vers. 14, 15. "Of the various explanations of this difficult passage only the two following are worthy of consideration. The one understands a *question* to the end of ver. 14, 'And wilt thou not, if I yet live, wilt thou not show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not?' Ver. 15 cannot, then, be a part of the question, but must be taken as the subjoined expression of confident expectation: 'And thou wilt not cut off thy kindness,' etc. But this sudden, abrupt transition to a question, and then, again, to direct discourse, is strange, even if these vacillations and diversities of discourse are referred to Jonathan's excited feeling. The second explanation, which is the preferable one, introduces a wish by a slight change in the pointing of the Hebrew. Jonathan, having invoked a blessing on David, thus expresses his wish for himself: And wouldst thou, if I still live, wouldst thou show me the kindness of God, and not, if I die, not cut off thy love from my house for ever?' So Syr., Arab., Maur., Then., Ew., Keil." (*Erdmann.*) Jonathan's request was fulfilled. See 2 Sam., chap. ix.

Ver. 16. "So Jonathan made a covenant," etc., "namely, by bringing David to promise kindness to his family for ever." *(Keil.)* The second clause is generally understood to be a continuation of the historian's words, and is rendered, "And Jehovah required it at the hand of David's enemies," *i.e.*, Jonathan's words were fulfilled. So Keil and others.

Ver. 17. This verse is generally understood to mean that Jonathan made his love to David the ground of his request, or *(Trans. of Lange's Commentary)* "his love to David made him anxious to maintain friendly relations between their houses."

Ver. 19. "When thou hast stayed three days." "Either with your family in Bethlehem, or wherever you find it convenient." *(Jamieson.)* **"Come down quickly."** The Hebrew here is literally "*Come down very*," but our authorised rendering seems to accord better with the sense than any other. Erdmann remarks that it might be necessary to insist on a quick descent to the place of meeting on account of the danger of being observed. **"When the business,"** etc. Literally "*on the day of the deed.*" Gesenius refers it to the attempt of Saul to kill David, narrated in chap. xix. 2, and Jonathan's effort to save his friend on that occasion. Erdmann coincides in this view. **"Ezel."** *The stone of departure. (Gesenius.)* "So called, probably, from its being the spot whence David separated from his friend." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 23. "The matter." Rather, "*the word.*" "This refers not merely to the sign agreed upon, but to the whole matter, including the renewal of the bond of friendship." *(Keil.)* **"Behold, the Lord is between,"** etc. See Gen. xxxi. 49.

Ver. 24. "So David hid himself," etc. Some expositors think that David went first to Bethlehem, others that the visit to his father's house was entirely a fabrication. **"Meat,"** *i.e.*, food of any kind.

Ver. 25. "A seat by the wall." "The left-hand corner at the upper end of a room was, and still is, in the East, the most honourable place. The person seated there has his left arm

confined by the wall but his right hand is at full liberty. From Abner's position next the king, and David's seat being left empty, it would seem that a state etiquette was observed at the royal table, each of the courtiers and ministers having places assigned to them according to their respective gradations of rank." *(Jamieson).* "**Jonathan arose.**" Kiel understands here that when Abner entered Jonathan rose from his seat by the side of Saul and gave up his place to Abner, others that he arose and seated Abner on the other side of Saul in David's vacant place in order that the latter might not be missed. This latter suggestion seems, however, to be contradicted by the last clause of the verse which states that David's place was empty.

Ver. 27. "**The son of Jesse.**" "Saul seems to hate the name of David and in contempt he calls him the son of Jesse." *(Wordsworth).*

Ver. 30. "**Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman.**" "This is a striking oriental form of abuse, the counterpart of that ancient benediction (Luke xi. 27). Saul was not angry with his wife; it was the son only upon whom he meant by this style of address to discharge his resentment; and the principle upon which it is founded seems to be that of a genuine filial instinct; it is a more inexpiable offence to hear the name and character of a parent traduced than any personal reproach. In every Eastern family the great object of devotion and respect is the mother. There are familiar expressions which show this very strongly. 'Pull my father's beard, but do not speak ill of my mother,' 'Strike me, but do not curse my mother.'" *(Jamieson).*

Ver. 31. "**He shall surely die.**" Literally, "he is a son of death."

Ver. 34. "**He was grieved for David.**" "The generosity of Jonathan's character is very apparent. He did not resent the injury and insult offered to himself so much as the wrong done to his friend." *(Biblical Commentary).*

Ver. 38. "While in vers. 20-22, this procedure is summarily described of *three* arrows, the account here is of *one*. . . . We must suppose that Jonathan did so with each of the three arrows." *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 40. "**Artillery,**" *i.e.*, his bows and arrows. "The French word *artillerie* signifies archery, and the term is still used in England, in the designation of the "artillery company of London," the association of archers, though they have long disused bows and arrows." *(Jamieson).*

Ver. 41. "**A place toward the south.**" "An unintelligible description; one expects a repetition of the description of David's hiding-place in verse 19. The word rendered *toward* is the same as that rendered *near* in ver. 19, but instead of *the stone Ezel* following, there comes the inexplicable "the south," (*negeb*) a word with which the adverb *near* is never joined, as it never is either with any other denoting a quarter of the heavens. The Sept. in both places read *argab* or *ergab*, a word meaning a *heap of stones*. If this is the true reading, David's hiding-place was either a natural cavernous rock which was called *argab*, or some ruin of an ancient building, equally suited for a hiding place." *(Biblical Commentary).*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

SAUL'S DISPLEASURE AGAINST JONATHAN.

Here we have—

I. A strengthening of friendship between David and Jonathan. Two things contributed to this. 1. *An act of confidence on the part of David.* It shows how entire was the trust that David had in his friend's fidelity, that in his extremity at this time he sought his presence and help. That he was to displace Jonathan on the throne of Israel was probably a fact which both of them now recognised, and in a friendship less perfect it would have had the effect of making David somewhat doubtful of the continuance of Jonathan's regard. But he shows that he has fully gauged the exceeding love which left no room in Jonathan's heart for any feeling of rivalry, and the very fact that he confided so entirely in his friend formed a new link in the already strong chain which bound them together. Where there is a sincere and unselfish love at the foundation of friendship, acts of mutual confidence increase and strengthen it. 2. *A new act of self-denial on the part of Jonathan.* Jonathan had before ventured to plead with his father on behalf of David. He had done more—he had fearlessly asserted his innocence, and now although his method of procedure

was different, it was evidently regarded by Saul as a declaration of friendship for David. And in proportion as Saul's wrath grew more fixed, so was the danger proportionately increased of those who showed him any favour. How dangerous it now was for Jonathan to defend him was apparent when his father's anger went so far as an attempt to slay him. But this new exposure to danger for his friend's sake would only cement the friendship on both sides. It is almost certain that David came to hear of Jonathan's narrow escape from Saul's javelin, and the thought that the risk had been run on his account must have deepened his grateful love. But the same risk and danger would have had a deepening influence also on Jonathan's love for David, for every act of self-denial for another gives us a new interest in him, and makes our affection for him stronger than before. It is like new wood placed upon a fire—it gives new life to that which is already burning, and increases the volume of the whole.

II. A widening of the distance between Saul and his son. Jonathan's filial respect for his father is as bright a feature in his character as his devotion to his friend. It manifests itself in his temperate remonstrance with his father when himself condemned to death by his unreasoning rashness (see chap. xiv. 43), and when the same blind passion was prompting Saul to seek the life of David. In this chapter also it is displayed in his unwillingness to believe David's assertion that Saul still sought his life. But the infatuation which had made a breach between the monarch and probably his most courageous and faithful subject, now creates one between the father and his most noble and dutiful son. It may well be supposed that the relations of Saul and Jonathan were never, after the occurrence here related, what they were before, and Saul's conduct is a striking illustration of the infatuation of wilful sin, which leads a man to cut off from his life one by one his truest sources of blessing and happiness.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Friendship among the servants of God. Three questions: 1. Wherein is friendship among the servants of God grounded?—It is a covenant in the Lord. 2. What perils threaten even friendship among the servants of God?—That one friend, overlooking another's sin, may do for his sake what is not right in the sight of God. 3. What blessing rests upon friendship among the servants of God?—It teaches unenvying joy with them that rejoice, and faithful mourning and forbearing with them that mourn.—*J. Disselhoff.*

Ver. 3. It must not be forgotten that, to believers under the Old Covenant especially, Death was not yet the angel with the palm-branch of peace, as we to whom "life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel" know it, or at least ought to know it. If, notwithstanding, the thought that there is "but a step between us and death" fills us also with horror, as too frequently happens, how shall we venture to blame the man living under the Old Testament economy, if we hear him, in his trying situation, express the wish that he might escape at least *that form* of death which was intended for him?—*Krummacher.*

Ver. 4. Here friendship goes too far. It is wrong to promise unconditional compliance with the wishes of another. He may err in judgment and ask what is unwise, or may be misled by interest and ask what is wrong. And, besides, every man is solemnly bound to exercise his own judgment and conscience in the direction of his own conduct. Jonathan was led by this promise to

tell a falsehood which his father detected, and was thereby the more enraged.—*Trans. of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 8. So long as one sees before him ordinary ways and means of escaping from danger, he should make use of them, and not look for extraordinary help from God, that he may not tempt God.—*Starke.*

Ver. 17. True love delights in receiving and giving repeated and strong assurances. This is very different from the repeated assurance which distrust demands.—*Trans. of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 41. *Strong men weeping.* 1. Great occasion for it here. (*a*). Personal separation. (*b*). Mad injustice of their father. (*c*). Prospect of a bitter conflict. 2. Not unbecoming when on sufficient occasion. Compatible (*a*). With manly courage and spirit. David and Jonathan were certainly brave. (*b*). With great self-control (ch. xvii. 29; xviii. 14; xx. 32). (*c*). With living trust in Providence (ver. 22).—*Trans. of Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XXI.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. The position of Nob cannot now be determined, only from Isa. x. 28-33, we gather that it was on the road northward between Jerusalem and Anathoth. Porter identifies its site with "a low peaked dell a little to the right of the northern road and opposite to *Shâfât*. He found there several cisterns hewn in the rock, large building stones, and various other indications of an ancient town." (*Smith's Biblical Dictionary*). Others place it at the modern village of *El-Isawiyeh*, about a mile north-west of Jerusalem, but the objection to this spot is that the words of Isaiah imply that it was nearer the city of Jerusalem. "**Ahimelech.**" Most likely the same as the Ahiah mentioned in chap. xiv. 3 (see notes on that chapter). In Mark ii. 26 *Abiathar* the son of Ahimelech (see chap. xxii. 20) is said to be the person who was high-priest at the time when David ate the shew-bread. Professor Hackett in the *Biblical Dictionary* shews that in 2 Sam. viii. 17, and in 1 Chron. xxiv. 3, 6, 31, the two names are confused with each other, and the same is probably the case in Mark. It is possible that father and son might have borne both names, or, as Hackett suggests, "Abiathar might have been the person who persuaded his father to allow him to have the shew-bread, and it is probable the loaves were Abiathar's (Lev. xxiv. 9), and given by him with his own hand to David." "**Why art thou alone?**" As the son-in-law of the king it would be unusual for David to travel unattended. "We must presume that Ahimelech knew of Saul's hatred to David but not of the most recent occurrences." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 2. "**I have appointed my servants.**" "This was probably true. It is scarcely credible that a person of David's rank and consideration should not have secured some attendants and followers. . . . . Moreover, our Lord (Mark ii. 26) distinctly asserts that the priest gave the shew-bread to David, and 'them that were with him.'" (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 4. "**There is no common bread.**" "*Common* as opposed to *holy*. Thus the English word is also used in Acts x. 14, 15, 28. . . . . It gives an idea of the depressed condition of the priesthood at this time that Ahimelech should have had no bread at hand except the shew-bread." (*Biblical Commentary.*) "**If the young men,**" etc. "Thereby the principle of the legal prescription of Levitical purity was satisfied, inasmuch as the circumstances—the lack of ordinary bread, the haste which the alleged important commission of the king required, the duty of aiding in the execution as much as possible, and the pious behaviour of David in inquiring the Lord's will at the holy place—seemed to justify a deviation from the rule concerning the eating of the shew-bread." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 6. "**The vessels of the young men are holy,**" etc. This phrase to the end of the verse is very obscure, and has been variously rendered and understood. Some understand the word vessel in the New Testament sense of body, others of the clothes of the men, or other articles connected with their person. It is generally admitted that the word translated *in a manner* should be rendered *way*. The principal renderings of the clause are as follows:—"*When*

I came out the young men's things were holy (Levitically clean); *and if it is an unholy way, it becomes even holy through the instrument, i.e.*, on the supposition of the important royal mission, upon which David pretended to be sent; the way is sanctified before God, when he, his chosen servant, is the instrument." This is Keil's rendering. Erdmann's reading is similar, understanding the *unholy way*, however, to refer not to David's enterprise, but to the act of ceremonial illegality of eating the shew-bread, and the word translated *vessel* at the end of the verse to refer to Ahimelech. "*And though this is the manner of common bread* (*i.e.*, though it is treating it like common bread to give it to me), *yet surely to-day the bread in the vessel is holy*, (*i.e.*, there is fresh shew-bread baked and put on the table in place of what you give us; the day being Friday, as is indicated in the verse following." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 6. "**That was taken from before the Lord,**" etc. "It seems to be mentioned as an alleviating fact, that the bread had already been taken away from before the Lord, having remained on the table in the holy place seven days according to the law." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 7. "**Detained before the Lord,**" *i.e.*, at the tabernacle, either for the purpose of purification, or as a proselyte received by circumcision, or in the fulfilment of a vow, or for suspected leprosy. "It is not impossible that Doeg may have been in custody or in sanctuary for some crime." *(Biblical Dictionary.)* "**Edomite, the chiefest of the herdsmen.**" "He had probably come over with Saul in his wars with Edom." *(Ewald.)* "On account of the importance which still attached in Saul's time to the possession of herds as a family power, Doeg's position must have been an important one." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 8. "**I have neither brought my sword.**" That in such pressing danger David fled without arms, is to be explained on the ground that "he feared he would be recognised, or as an armed man concealing himself by suspected (Clericus), or that he fled in great haste." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 9. "**In a cloth behind the ephod.**" "A sign of the great value attached to this dedicatory offering." *(Keil.)* "**There is none like that.**" "Not only for its size and superior temper, but for its being a pledge of the Divine favour to him, and a constant stimulus to his faith." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 10. "**Fled that day.**" "He only stayed in Nob long enough to get arms and food . . We do not know whether he had already determined to go into Philistia, or now first suddenly resolved upon it, possibly in consequence of Doeg's unexpected appearance." *(Eramann.)* **Achish,** or *Abimelech.* (See Psa. xxxiv.) This last was the standing title of the Philistian princes of Gath. (See Gen. xxvi. 1.) "As some years had passed since the defeat of Goliath, and the conqueror of Goliath was probably not known personally to many of the Philistines, he might hope that he should not be recognised in Gath, and that he might receive a welcome there as a fugitive who had been driven away by Saul, the leading foe of the Philistines." *(Kiel.)*

Ver. 11. "**The King,**" *i.e.*, the hero. They could not have known of his Divine election.

Ver. 15. "**Shall this fellow come?**" etc. "Whether Achish had David taken over the border, or at any rate out of the town; or whether David went away of his own accord; or whether he was taken away by his servants, is not mentioned, as being of no importance to the narrative." *(Keil.)* *Note*—"From this narrative it appears that David and the Philistines understood one another's language, as on other grounds it is probable that the Hebrew and Philistine dialects were nearly identical." *(Tr. of Lange's Commentary.)*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

David's Flight to Gath.

I. Men who have courageously encountered a formidable enemy may be found fleeing before a meaner foe. In military history we have records of panics which have overtaken armies which had hitherto been renowned for bravery, and for these temporary failures of courage no adequate reason can be assigned. The fact is there, but it does not admit of full explanation. And it is the same sometimes with men individually, whether they are fighting against foes of flesh and blood or against less tangible but not less real opponents. The heart of the bravest man may sometimes give way, and give way when there does not seem so much real danger as at a former period when he showed no sign of quailing. In the case both of the many and the one the panic may be

partly attributable to an overwrought state of the imagination, which magnifies the present peril and adds to the real foes "an army of phantoms, vast and wan." Or it may arise from the struggle having lasted long, and then the spirit which could rise to a high pitch of enthusiasm for a single encounter finds itself unequal to the task of sustaining itself at so high a level of heroism. These suggestions apply to cases in which the courage displayed appears to have a purely human origin, and to those when the great deeds of valour have been performed by the inspiration of strong faith in an unseen God. And they are quite as applicable to the warfare of every-day life as they are to that which is "with confused noise and garments rolled in blood." For the world is full of men and women fighting every day of their lives against adverse circumstances outside of them or against sin within them, with a fortitude that gives them full title to be ranked among the heroes of their age. But whoever are the warriors, and in whatever kind of warfare they may be engaged, they do sometimes flee from a lesser foe after having conquered a greater. It was so with David now. The sword of Saul was more terrible to him than the sword of Goliath had been. He had fearlessly looked in the face of the giant, but though he had been helped to slay this most formidable foe, and all the trust that he then placed in the arm of Jehovah had been fully justified, he is now seen fleeing before the man who had quailed before the Philistine, and faith seems now to have no abode in his soul, not so much as a resting-place for the sole of her foot. Without doubt he permitted his mind to dwell upon Saul's malignity, and upon the many agents whom he could employ against him, to the exclusion of the signal token of Divine help which had been afforded him in the valley of Elah, and the assurance of Divine protection of which the anointing oil had been a pledge. And thus neglecting by meditation upon God's past goodness to stay himself upon the Divine arm in the present, he becomes a prey to his over-wrought imagination, and presents himself before us in his full manhood in a much less admirable light than in the days of his youth. We must not forget, however, that stronger faith in God is required to sustain a man in a long-continued trial or in a succession of trials than to carry him victoriously through one which, although it makes a great demand upon him for the moment, is soon over. And this helps us to understand David's failure at this time, and to sympathise with his frailty though we may not excuse his sin.

II. **The fear of losing a lesser life may lead men to imperil a life which is greater.** There is a life of the body and there is a condition of character which is moral life, and though it is natural and right for men to be careful in a measure of the former, yet a desire to preserve it should never lead to the sacrifice of the latter. The sword of the most bitter enemy is less to be dreaded than the sword of conscience. The most terrible bodily death is infinitely preferable to wounding the moral sense and perhaps doing permanent injury to the character. The retaining of bodily life is by no means necessary to a blessed existence, but existence can nowhere be blessed if there is not integrity of soul. Hence our Lord warns His disciples not to be over-solicitous concerning the life of the body, lest by so doing they endanger a higher and more precious life. "*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*" (Luke ix. 24). Here loss is gain and gain is loss. Nevertheless, so strong is the love of bodily life, and so instinctively do men shrink from a violent death, that even good and true men have not seldom yielded for a time to the temptation to endanger the most precious for that which is comparatively worthless. David did so when he lied to Ahimelech in order to obtain from him the succour that he needed, and when he feigned madness in the presence of the Philistine nobles. In both cases he inflicted upon himself far more grievous and real injury than any that Saul could have

dealt out to him. His enemy's sword could only have killed his body, but his sin damaged his soul. No weapon forged by man can take away peace of mind, but wilful transgression must fill a man with remorse if his conscience is at all awake, and a man like David could hardly fail to reproach himself afterwards for having thus wandered from the path of rectitude. But even if he did not do so, the harm done to his moral nature was the same and even greater, inasmuch as unrepented sin deadens the conscience and makes further trangression more easy. When a man is suffering acute pain from a dangerous wound his life may be in great danger, but if while the wound is unhealed there is no pain, the surgeon has good reason to fear that mortification has set in and that all hope of life is past. So in the moral nature that wound which is followed by no pain is the most fatal.

III. A Divine law which is limited and temporary must yield to one which is universal and permanent. Our Lord Himself justifies the action of David and Ahimelech in the matter of the shew-bread (Mark ii. 25), on the principle that the happiness and well-being of man is the end of all God's laws concerning them, and that therefore if a merely ceremonial law interferes with that it must be for the time set aside. Possibly David's words in verse 5 may also have some such meaning. (See Critical Notes.) All the ceremonial laws given to Israel by God had for their end the elevation of a nation of idolatrous slaves to a higher moral level by creating within them a sense of their own sinfulness and of God's infinite majesty and purity, and their own highest interests were bound up in the strict observance of them. But just because the end of all was man's good, so it followed that if in a particular case that good was only to be obtained by a temporary violation of the ceremonial observance, that violation was in accordance with the will of God. Ahimelech showed that he understood the real intention of the law of the shew-bread when he broke it to satisfy the needs of hungry men, for he acted on the principle that the ceremonial laws were made for man and not man for the ceremonial laws, and thus in a measure anticipated Our Saviour's exposition of them. Although all the details connected with the Jewish worship were symbols of unchangeable truths and of immutable moral laws, they were symbols only, and therefore the laws of their observance were at all times subordinate to those universal and changeless moral laws which never clash with each other, and the violation of which no exigency can ever justify.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Mingling of good and evil in David's character. (1) Though a brave and devout man, he falls into grievous falsehood and degrading deception, through cowardly fear and lack of trust in God. A warning to us. Compare Neh. xiii. 26; 1 Cor. x. 12. (2) Though so weak and erring, he remembers God's help in the past (ver. 9), cries to Him now (Psa. xxxiv. 6), rejoices in Him anew (*ibid*, ver. 1), and resolves henceforth to speak truth and to do good (*ibid*, vers. 13, 14); compare Psa. lvi. 13. An encouragement to us; compare 1 John ii. 1.

Ver. 2. Who can look to pass this pilgrimage without infirmities, when David dissembleth to Ahimelech? A weak man's rules may be better than the best man's actions. God lets us see some blemishes in His holiest servants, that we may neither be too highly conceited of flesh and blood, nor too much dejected when we have been miscarried into sin. Hitherto hath David gone upright; now he begins to halt with the priest of God, and under pretence of Saul's employment, draws that favour from Ahimelech which shall afterwards cost him his head.

What could Ahimelech have thought too dear for God's anointed, God's champion? It is not like but that, if David had sincerely opened himself to the priest as he had done to the prophet, Ahimelech would have seconded Samuel in some secret and safe succour of so unjust a distress, whereas he is now, by a false colour, led to that kindness which shall be prejudicial to his life. Extremities of evil are commonly inconsiderate; either for that we have not leisure to our thoughts, or perhaps (so we may be perplexed) not thoughts to our leisure. What would David have given afterwards to have redeemed this oversight!—*Bp. Hall.*

There is nothing will keep a man from sin more surely than confidence in God; but despair is the most dangerous condition into which one can fall. While faith and hope last, there will be energy, and watchfulness, and purity; but with despair come recklessness and folly. We are saved by hope; but when we despair of God's help, we run into extremes of wickedness. When a merchant is in difficulties, there is no great danger so long as he believes that he can retrieve himself, and hopes that he will come out all right. But when he falls into despair, he becomes regardless alike of God or man, and runs headlong into practices of which in other circumstances he would never have thought, thereby destroying alike his character and future.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Vers. 10-15. David had lost his faith in Jehovah, and put his confidence in Achish, and nothing more salutary could have happened to him than such a reception as that which was given to him at Gath. When a youth is going on a wrong course the best thing that can befall him is failure and disgrace, and the worst thing that can come to him is what the world calls success. If he succeed the probability is that he will go farther astray than ever; but if he fail there is hope that he will return to the right path, and seek alliance with Jehovah. This last was the case with David in the instance before us, if at least we may judge of the effect which his experience produced upon him, from the songs which he wrote with special reference to the incidents at which we have been looking. The titles of the 34th and 56th Psalms connect these odes with David's residence in Gath; and though there are few acknowledgments of sin in them, yet they indicate that, as the result and outcome of his trials, he was led to look away from all earthly helpers to the Lord alone. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles." Perhaps, too, there may be an implied condemnation of the course which he had been pursuing, and a virtual resolution to abstain from it in the future, when he says, "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it." And it is scarcely possible to doubt that, from his own penitence for the sins of which he had just been guilty, and his own experience of God's favour when he returned to him, he was led to sing, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

It may appear strange that all this should have happened immediately after his pleasant and profitable sojourn with Samuel at the school of the prophets. But perhaps the very contrast between his happiness at Naioth and his continual suspense at Gibeah, where he felt himself to be like one standing on the very edge of an active volcano, may help to account for his depression. In any case it is by no means an uncommon experience that times of great spiritual elevation are followed by periods of deep dejection. Every height has its hollow; and as Peter went from the first Lord's Supper to his denial of the Master, David went from Naioth to Nob, and from Nob to Gath. It is a suggestive incident, bidding us be

always on our guard against temptation, and then, most of all, when we have been enjoying the most exalted privileges.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

It is always a dangerous course when believers betake themselves in their necessities to the children *of this world* for protection and help. Without taking into account that too easily in the circle of such benefactors and deliverers do they lose their balance, and, making court to them for their favour, yield to the temptation to disown their faith, and in word and conduct to place themselves on an equality with the world, such a step gives to the latter occasion secretly to triumph, and they who are so willing to be called "the chosen," when distress comes upon them know not how to be contented with their God and his help alone, but gladly permit themselves to seek for aid from those to whom they do not even concede the name of brethren. Never will they succeed in truly reconciling the enemies of their faith by means of affected accommodation to them and their forms of life; for, according to the well-known testimony of God, the enmity between those who are "after the flesh," and those who are "after the spirit," is a *fixed* principle, and though covered with many a fair garland of courtesy and politeness, yet, even when universal love bears the sceptre in the heart of God's children, that enmity cannot be abolished till regenerating grace has made of the "*twain one.*"—*Krummacher.*

CHAPTER XXII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Adullam.**" "The site of Adullam (mentioned in Josh. xv. 35, etc) has not yet been identified, but from the mention of it in the above and other passages in proximity with other known towns, it is likely that it was near *Deir Dûbban*, five or six miles north of *Eleutheropolis*. . . The limestone cliffs of the whole of that locality are pierced with extensive excavations (Robinson ii. 23, 51-53), some one of which was possibly the refuge of David." (Abridged from *Smith's Biblical Dictionary*). The general opinion of commentators and travellers agree with this, but Thomson supports the ancient view that it was near the village *Khureitein*, five miles south-east of Bethlehem, and thus describes his visit to that spot: "Leaving our horse in charge of wild Arabs, and taking one for a guide, we started for the cave, having a fearful gorge below, gigantic cliffs above, and a path winding along a shelf of the rock, narrow enough to make the nervous among us shudder. At length from a great rock hanging on the edge of this shelf, we sprang by a long leap into a low window which opened into the perpendicular face of the cliff. We were then within the hold of David, and creeping half doubled through a narrow crevice for a few rods, we stood beneath the dark vault of the first grand chamber of this mysterious and oppressive cavern. Our whole collection of lights did little more than make the damp darkness visible. After groping about as long as we had time to spare, we returned to the light of day, fully convinced that, with David and his lion-hearted followers inside, all the strength of Israel under Saul could not have forced an entrance—would not even have attempted it."

Ver. 2. "**Everyone that was discontented,**" etc. Literally, bitter in soul, as in chap. i. 10 "The comparison of this body with Catiline's followers (Clericus, Thenius) supposes that David's retinue was of a similar character with Catiline's, a riotous, adventure-seeking rabble. But there is nothing in the narrative to support such a supposition, and David's position as to them, and to Saul, is decidedly against it. . . . . Hengstenberg (on Psa. vii. 10) rightly remarks David's war with Saul was one not of individuals, but of parties; the wicked espoused Saul's side, the righteous David's; compare the much misunderstood passage 1 Sam. xxii. 2. The *distressed* persons were those who were persecuted under Saul's government on account of their love for David. The *debtors* were such as, under Saul's arbitrary misrule, were oppressed by their creditors, and received from the government no protection against the violation of the law of loan and interest (Exod. xxii. 25, Lev. xxv. 36, Deut. xxiii. 19). They were 'bitter of soul,' not as 'desirous of new things,' not as merely dissatisfied with their present condition (Clericus), but 'as those whose anxiety of soul over the ever-worsening condition of the kingdom under Saul, drove them to a leader from whom for the future they might hope for better things.'

(*Ew.*) Comp. Jephthah's fugitive life and retinue of "poor empty persons." (*Erdmann.*) "**Four hundred men.**" "A list of the principal among them is given in 1 Chron. xii. 8-18, and some of their acts are described in 2 Sam. xxiii. 13-22." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 3. "**Mizpeh of Moab.**" "Mizpeh; literally a watch-tower or mountain height commanding a very extensive prospect. Here it is probably a proper name belonging to a mountain fastness on the high land which bounded the Arboth Moab on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, most likely on the mountains of Abarim or Pisgah (Deut. xxxiv. 1), and which could easily be reached from the country round Bethlehem by crossing the Jordan near the point where it entered the Dead Sea." (*Keil.*) "Perhaps he resorted to Moab for refuge because his ancestress Ruth was from that country." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 4. "**The hold.**" This fastness could not have been the cave of Adullam, because in the next verse we read that David was commanded to return to Judah, but it was probably the same refuge to which David had taken his parents.

Ver. 5. "**Gad.**" It must remain a matter for conjecture whether Gad had gone with David to Adullam, or whether he now comes to him for the first time with a special Divine message. "**Get thee into the land of Judah.**" Keil thinks that "David was not to seek for refuge outside the land; not only that he might not be estranged from his fatherland and the people of Israel, which would have been opposed to his calling to be King of Israel, but also that he might learn to trust entirely in the Lord as his only refuge and fortress." But Erdmann sees the reason for this direction in the fact that "the Philistines were now making plundering incursions into the south of Judah, help and protection against them was needed, and this David and his valiant band could give, and thus fulfil part of the theocratic calling in respect of which the distracted, arbitrary rule of Saul was now impotent." "**Forest of Hareth.**" An unknown region. Josephus calls it the *city* of Hareth. It was probably a woody district in the mountains of Judah.

Ver. 6. "**Abode under a tree,**" etc. Rather, *was sitting under a tamarisk tree upon the height.* (For Ramah see Notes on chap. i. 1.) "Oriental princes frequently sit with their court under some shady canopy in the open air. A spear was the early sceptre, as we are informed by *Justin* . . . Saul's spear might be distinguished from common spears by its length as well as its decorations; and that this was likely to be the case may be inferred from the relics of Egypt and Assyria." (*Jamieson.*) "**All his servants.**" "It was therefore a full assembly of the *personnel* of the court." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 7. "**Ye Benjamites.**" "Showing how isolated the tribes still were, and how, for the most part, Saul was surrounded by his own tribesmen only." (*Biblical Commentary.*) "In Saul's words there is the latent sense: Will he, of another tribe, reward you, as I have done to you, my fellow tribesmen? Will he not ratner favour his tribesmen, the men of Judah? Will it not be to your interest to stand on my side?" (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 9. "**Which was set over the servants,**" etc. As this does not agree with the position assigned to Doeg in the former chapter, some render the clause "And he stood with the servants," etc. Keil thinks that Doeg had been invested with the office of marshal of the court.

Ver. 10. "**He inquired of the Lord,**" etc. Some think this was untrue, but the words of Ahimelech in verse 15 seem to admit the fact.

Ver. 14. "**Faithful,**" rather *proved, tried.* "**Goeth at thy bidding.**" Probably this should be read, "Has access to thy private audience." The Hebrew word is so rendered elsewhere. (See 2 Sam. xxiii. 23, and 1 Chron. xi. 25.)

Ver. 15. "**Did I then begin,**" etc. The most obvious meaning of these words is, "Was it the first time that I had inquired of the Lord for David concerning enterprises with which the king had entrusted him?" So Keil, Erdmann, and others. Some however (*Bib. Commentary*, etc.) understand Ahimelech to deny having done such a thing on the ground that this was a duty which he owed to the king only.

Ver. 17. "**Footmen,**" *i.e.*, runners, halberdiers.

Ver. 18. "**A linen ephod.**" "The allusion to the priestly clothing, like the repetition of the expression, '*priests of Jehovah*,' serves to bring out into its true light the crime of the bloodthirsty Saul and his executioner Doeg." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 20. "**Abiathar.**" How he escaped can only be conjectured. Bishop Patrick suggests that he was left in charge of the sanctuary when the other priests obeyed Saul's summons.

NOTE.—"During this first period of David's life as outlaw, several incidents occurred which are not mentioned in this narrative. We learn from 2 Sam.

xxiii. 13 that three of his chief heroes came to him in the cave of Adullam, one of whom was his nephew Abishai, afterwards a famous general. A little after (1 Chron. xi. 15-19) occurred that noble act of loving daring, when the "three mightiest" broke through the Philistine army and brought their leader water from the well of Bethlehem, for which he longed. This was while he was in the "hold," and at this time apparently came to him the stout band of lion-faced, gazelle-footed Gadites, who swam the Jordan when its banks overflowed, and scattered all enemies before them (1 Chron. xii. 8-15), and an enthusiastic body of men of Judah and Benjamin, for whose friendship Amasai answered in a passionate speech (1 Chron. xii. 8-15).—*(Trans. of Lange's Commentary).*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—4.

The Cave of Adullam.

I. Oppressive rule transforms good subjects into outlaws. When those who are in authority disregard those universal laws of righteousness and beneficence which are equally binding upon every man, they must not expect obedience from those under their rule; their injustice will create a lawlessness in the governed classes which, although it is rebellion against *them*, may be obedience to a higher and juster rule. David had been a loyal servant to King Saul, and had given full proof of true patriotism, but the oppression which he had undergone, and the danger to which he was exposed through Saul's injustice compelled him to take up the position of an outlaw. He had once and again gone forth at the peril of his own life to defend the throne of the king, but justice to himself now demanded that he should take up arms in self-defence. It is most probable also that those who joined him were men who had likewise been transformed by oppression from obedient subjects into rebels. Before we condemn men for resistance to authority we must know what is the nature of the authority they resist.

II. Common suffering is a strong bond of union. There are many influences which tend to bridge over the differences which divide men—differences of birth, of education, of character and disposition—but perhaps there is nothing which does this so effectually as a common calamity. If a vessel is in danger of sinking, the passengers who have hitherto been separated by distinctions of rank recognise their common brotherhood and forget all minor differences in their common danger. When a city is besieged the noble in the palace and the artisan in the workshop exchange words and looks of sympathy as they recognise their common peril. In the band which gathered to David in the cave of Adullam there were doubtless men who would have never united in any common action if they had not been suffering from a common calamity—the misrule of Saul. Separated from each other and from David by every variety of circumstance and disposition, they were one with him and with each other in indignation against oppression, and in determination to defend their lives and liberties. Times of prosperity are not favourable to the promotion of union among men, but times of adversity often bring them very near together.

III. Relationship to great men has its penalties as well as its advantages. It was doubtless a proud day for Jesse when he became aware that he was to be the head of a royal house, but the immediate consequences were not pleasant. If he had not been related to the chosen king of Israel, he would doubtless have been permitted to remain unmolested in his quiet village home, but because he was the father of David he was obliged to flee from his native land. When the storm is abroad, the highest trees are most exposed to its violence, and if they

fall they bring down with them those which stand near. So, in times of national disquietude, the most prominent men are most in danger, and those who are related to them are endangered by their relationship. There are, therefore, drawbacks as well as advantages in belonging to the family of a great man.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

If it behoved a ruler to know the heart of his subjects—their sorrow, their wrongs, their crimes—to know them and to sympathise with them, this was surely as precious a part of his schooling as the solitude of his boyhood, or as any intercourse he had with easy men who had never faced the misery of the world, and had never had any motive to quarrel with its laws. He was now among the lowest of those whom he would afterwards have to govern—not hearing at a distance of their doings and sufferings, but partaking in them livingly, realising the influences which were disposing them to evil. And here he was acquiring more real reverence for law and order, more understanding of their nature, than those can ever arrive at who have never known the need of them from the want of them. He was bringing his wild followers under a loving discipline and government which they had never experienced; he was teaching them to confess a law which no tyrant had created, no anarchy could set aside.—*Maurice.*

Who can fail to recognise in David, as he here appears, a remarkable type of the Divine Prince of Peace, who at a future age would go forth from his house. As David then stood, so Christ, his illustrious descendant, "according to the flesh," now stands almost everywhere, misapprehended by the world where not hated and persecuted, and only surrounded by a little band of devoted followers, comparatively small and insignificant, and for the most part contemptible in the eyes of the world, and, moreover, reviled by bitter enemies. . . . The dwelling-place of the exalted Son of David upon earth is meanwhile as unlike to a splendid royal palace as was David's cave of Adullam to a proud lordly mansion. The true Church is as yet concealed under a dark covering, yea, as with a widow's veil. Her Lord is not yet present to the sight. Her people walk by faith and not by sight, and know that they are surrounded by the powers of darkness, against whom their weapons of war are to be laid aside neither by day nor by night. A world stands in arms against the decided followers of the crucified King of Glory, and they are dealt with as very outlaws, on whom anyone may lay his hands. But even to them also the time comes when, as our fugitive must exchange the cave of Adullam for the gorgeous palace on Mount Zion, even so for *those* who are not offended at the "form of a servant" assumed by the Divine Son of David, and at the lowly aspect of His kingdom upon earth, the simple dwelling in which the Church now gathers together shall become transformed into a glorious building, irradiated with heavenly splendour, whose dome shall tower upward into the ever-opened heavens, whose pillars shall encompass the whole earth, and whose inhabitants, after they have waited patiently with their Head here below, shall reign with Him for ever.—*Krummacher.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF VERSE 5.

The Prophet Gad.

I. God does not leave His servants in their times of danger and perplexity without help and guidance. "*Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness*" (Psa. cxii. 4), and light often comes to men as it now came to David

by means of a man of God. For the very presence of such a man is light in the cloudy and dark day. It will encourage the dejected soul to hold fast its confidence in God, and will exercise a restraining influence when we are exposed to the temptation to turn aside from the path of right which great trial sometimes brings. David had yielded to such a temptation once, but Gad's companionship would be likely to prevent another such fall. The presence of a prophet of God in the hold was a token of God's good will, and as such was a light in the darkness. And the counsel of such a man at such a time is a light which not only cheers, but guides. God can guide His servants, as He can feed them, in many different ways. As He has fed them direct from heaven, so He has guided them by a voice direct from the invisible world. He has fed men by the instrumentality of angels, and He has guided them by such an instrumentality. But He more generally helps man by man, and this was the method He employed here.

II. When God's children have good reason to believe that the light that thus ariseth is a light from heaven, it is wise to follow its guidance implicitly. It is the first duty of a benighted traveller to make sure whether the light upon his path is an *ignis-fatuus* luring him to destruction, or the lamp of a friend pointing to the highway of safety. When he has made sure that it is the latter, he will only reveal his foolishness if he neglects to walk in the way which it reveals as the right one. Gad was doubtless well known to David; he was in all probability one of that company at Ramah who had grown up around Samuel, and upon whom the prophetic spirit had descended in such a manner as to qualify him to give counsel and guidance to the elect king of Israel, and David, in his unhesitating obedience to his word, acts with true humility and wisdom.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is to be noted here as an interesting fact, that in the hold of Adullam and in the wilderness of Judah we have, side by side, representatives of the oracular and the prophetical methods of the communication of the will of God to men; and that, in the life of David, as a whole, we have the era of the transition from the one to the other. Up to this time the priest had been the most important personage in the nation, and the only recognised channel through which God indicated his will to the people. True, there had been great outstanding prophets, like Moses and Samuel; but the former was an exception to all rules as being the leader of the Exodus; and the latter, from his training under Eli, was as much a priest as he was a prophet. True, again, in the time of the Judges there was Deborah, the prophetess; but she was raised up in connection with a particular crisis in the history of her people. The general system, however, was, that when the head of the nation, whether judge or king, wished, at any special emergency, to ask counsel of the Lord, the inquiry was made through the priest, and the answer was given by the Urim and Thummim. But now the prophet, as a standing official personage, comes into prominence, and the mind of God begins to be made known through his human individuality, and not through any such visible media as those which were connected with the priestly breastplate.

In the hold and in the wilderness, David received divine directions through both channels, but gradually, even in his life, the breastplate oracle disappears or falls into desuetude; and from the reign of Solomon downward we have no mention made of its employment in the Jewish annals. In the same gradual manner the prophet waxes into pre-eminence, Gad and Nathan preparing the way for Elijah and Elisha, and these, in their turn, giving place to Isaiah and Jeremiah, who were succeeded, in the days of the exile, by Ezekiel and Daniel; and in the era of the Restoration by Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Now, if we think out this subject a

little more fully, we shall see that in the life of David a distinct forward step was taken in the education of the people of God, from the first rudiments of external symbolism, on toward that system of spiritual simplicity under which we now live in the Gospel dispensation. . . . The call for faith was increased when the Urim and Thummin ceased, and the prophets came speaking in God's name, giving gradually fewer and fewer specific directions as to particular matters, and more and more proclaiming great spiritual principles. And now there is, more than ever, a demand for faith, when, under the New Testament economy, the way into the holiest is made manifest to every believer, and the answers to the soul's inquiries are given not by any objective oracle, but by the Christian's study of God's Word, as that is interpreted by the providences that are without him, and the Spirit of God that is dwelling within him. Hence, when we read the history of David's sojourn in the cave, or of his wanderings in the wilderness, and see the priest Abiathar on his right hand, and the prophet Gad on his left, we feel that we are standing on one of the great landing-places of that stairway of education, up which God led His people from the childhood of walking by sight, to the glorious liberty, and graceful movement, of that spiritual manhood which walks continually by faith.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

The Lord will never permit any prince who is heartily disposed to conduct the affairs of his government in his name, to be at any time altogether without some such Gad among his soldiers or officers around him—some man who, because he seeks not his own, unites the most incorruptible fidelity with his allegiance, and by whose mouth the Lord, as often as the foot of the prince is like to slip, will by his warnings and his counsel show to him the right and safe way. Woe to the land on the steps of whose throne there is not found, in the circle of dignified officers surrounding the ruler, at least one man who bears not only in his profession, but at the same time also in his entire consecrated personality, the stamp of a man of God, and who knows at the right time to throw the weight of the divine word and commandment into the balance-scales of the government! *Krummacher.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6-23.

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE PRIESTS.

I. Jealousy is a medium through which the best friends are transformed into foes. It matters not how beautiful the human face—if looked at through a distorted medium it will present the appearance of deformity and ugliness, and will probably look more like a monster than a man. And the passion of jealousy has the same distorting effect upon human character, and upon human actions and purposes. Elijah was the truest friend that king Ahab possessed, and the most self-denying patriot then living in his kingdom; but Ahab's jealousy made him appear as his personal enemy, and as the troubler of Israel (2 Kings xviii. 18; xxi. 20). Jonathan and David were men of rare nobility of character, and Saul's faithful sons and servants, yet his unreasoning jealousy transformed them into bitter foes.

II. The vilest purposes will not fail for lack of instruments. Jealousy is a passion which has given birth to some of the darkest purposes which the heart of man has ever conceived; but, alas! the blackest plots rarely, if ever, miscarry for want of instruments. A man bent upon murder can find a weapon of iron or stone to execute the deed, if he cannot lay his hand upon a well-tempered sword or a diamond-hilted dagger; and although the conscience of Saul's Hebrew servants revolted against his inhuman command, Doeg the Edomite was at hand to do the deed of blood.

III. The noble and ignoble deeds of men unite to fulfil the Divine purposes. The use man makes of his freedom of action seals him as a saint or a sinner; but whether his acts be godlike or devilish, they are used by God to carry out His purposes. Often God's creatures are the conscious executors of His will, and knowingly and intentionally carry out His designs, but sometimes even His own servants are unconscious instruments of His plans. The terrible incident with which this chapter closes was a fulfilment of the sentence long ago passed upon the house of Eli (chap. ii. 31), but the Divine sentence was fulfilled by the united action of men whose lives were governed by very different motives, and whose deeds ranged from the lowest depth of moral depravity to high moral heroism. The inhumanity and devilishness of Doeg and Saul, the lying of David, and the courageous boldness of Ahimelech, united all unconsciously to themselves to fulfil the purpose of God.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Pictures of human nature.—1. A man in authority, whose misfortunes, though due to his own fault, make him suspicious and cruelly unjust (ver. 8–16). 2. A basely ambitious man, who seeks to build himself up by ruining others (ver. 9, 10, 18, comp. Psa. lii.). 3. An innocent man accused, who defends himself both with forcible argument (ver. 14) and with dignified denial (ver. 15). 4. A good, but erring man, who mournfully sees that his sin has brought destruction on his friends.—*Transr. of Lange's Commentary.*

Vers. 18, 19. Behold in this history how impossible it is to arrest the consequences of our evil actions. David lied to Ahimelech, probably thinking not only to secure his own safety thereby, but also to keep the priest from being involved with him in the displeasure of Saul. But mark what ensued. Eighty-five priests, together with all the inhabitants of Nob, "both men and women, children and sucklings," were put to death for this sin of which he, and not they, had been guilty. I have no doubt that when David heard of all this he would willingly have given all that he had, ay, even his hopes of one day sitting on the throne of Israel, if he could have recalled the evil which he had spoken, and undone its dismal consequences. But it was impossible. The lie had gone forth from him; and having done so, it was no longer under his control, but would go on producing its diabolical fruits. And so it is yet. We cannot arrest the consequences of the evil which we do. Whether we will or not, it will continue to work on. We may, indeed, repent of our sin; we may even, through the grace of God for Christ's sake, have the assurance that we are forgiven for it; but the sin itself will go on working its deadly results. You may as soon think of staying an avalanche midway in its descent from the Alpine ridge, and so saving the village in the valley from destruction, or of stopping the bullet midway in its flight from the musket to the heart of him who will be destroyed by it, as think of arresting the consequences of the evil which you once have done.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

O the wise and deep judgments of the Almighty! God owed a revenge to the house of Eli, and now, by the delation of Doeg, He takes occasion to pay it. It was just in God, which in Doeg was most unjust. Saul's cruelty, and the treachery of Doeg, do not lose one dram of their guilt by the counsel of God; neither doth the holy counsel of God gather any blemish by their wickedness. If it had pleased God to inflict death upon them sooner, without any pretence of occasion, His justice had been clear from all imputations; now, if Saul and Doeg be instead of a pestilence or fever, who can cavil?—*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Keilah.**" A city of Judah, mentioned in Josh. xv. 44, and identified by Lieut. Van de Velde with a site containing ruins, and now called Kila, a few miles from Hebron. (See Smith's *Biblical Dictionary.*)

Ver. 2. "**Inquired of the Lord.**" (See verse 6.) "**Save Keilah.**" These words are a promise of victory.

Ver. 3. "**We be afraid,**" etc. "As persecuted fugitives, we are always in danger from Saul, and now shall we march against the Philistine ranks?" *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 6. "This verse is a supplementary historical explanation relative to the possibility of the inquiry of the Lord in verses 2 and 3, which was not possible without the high-priestly cape or ephod, to which was attached the Urim and Thummim." *(Erdmann.)* "The words are not to be understood as signifying that Abiathar did not come to David till he was in Keilah, but that, when he fled after David (chap. xxii. 20), he met with him as he was already preparing for the march to Keilah, and immediately proceeded with him thither." *(Keil.)*

Vers. 9-12. "It is evident from these verses that when the will of God was sought through the Urim and Thummim, the person making the inquiry placed the matter before God in prayer, and received an answer—but always to one particular question. For when David had asked the two questions given in verse 11, he received the answer to the second question only, and had to ask the first again." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 13. "**They went whithersoever,**" etc. Lit. "They wandered about where they wandered about, *i.e.*, wherever they could go without danger." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 14. "**Wilderness of Ziph.**" "A mountainous and sequestered region was generally called a wilderness, and took its name from some large town in the district. Two miles south-east of Hebron, and in the midst of a level plain, is *Tell Ziph*, an isolated and conical hillock, about one hundred feet high, probably the acropolis *(Van de Velde)*, or the ruins *(Robinson)* of the ancient city of Ziph, from which the surrounding wilderness was called. It seems, anciently, to have been covered by an extensive wood." *(Jamieson.)* "**Every day.**" "Either as long as he lived" *(Keil)*, or "continually." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 16. "**Strengthened his hand,**" etc. "By the recollection of the Divine promises, and of their mutual covenant." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 17. "**Saul, my father, knoweth.**" "The assurance of this must have forced itself involuntarily upon the mind of Saul, both from his own rejection, as foretold by Samuel, and also from the marvellous success of David in all his undertakings." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 19. "**Then came up the Ziphites.**" "There is no spot from which you can obtain a better view of David's wandering backwards and forwards in the desert than from the hill of Ziph, which affords a true panorama. The Ziphites could see David and his men moving to and fro in the mountains of the desert of Ziph, and could also perceive how he showed himself in the distance upon the hill *Hachilah*, on the south side of *Ziph* (which lies to the right by the desert), whereupon they sent as quickly as possible to Saul, and betrayed to him the hiding-place of his enemy." *(Van de Velde.)*

Ver. 24. "**Desert of Maon, in the plain, on the south of Jeshimon.**" Rather, "On the south or right hand of the desert. This lay farther south. The name still exists—Main, eight miles south-east of Hebron." *(Erdmann.)* "The mountain plateau seems here to end. It is true the summit ridge of the southern hills runs out a long way farther towards the south-west, but towards the south-east the ground sinks more and more down to a table-land of a lower level, which is called the plain to the right hand of the wilderness." *(Van de Velde.)* "On descending the hills, south-east of Maon, a wide prospect opened up before us over the country towards the Dead Sea, and on the south. The extensive tract we now overlooked had much of the general character of that around Beersheba, with which, indeed, it is connected, stretching off in that direction around the south-western termination of the long ridge which we were now crossing. This tract has apparently a lower level than the enclosed plain behind us around Carmel." *(Dr. Robinson.)*

Ver. 25. "**Into a rock.**" Rather "He descended the rock." "Probably the conical mountain of Main, or Maon, the top of which is now surrounded with ruins." *(Robinson.)* It is evidently the same as that mentioned in the next verse, along which David was escaping on one side, while Saul was seeking him on the other.

Ver. 28. "Selah-hammahlekoth." Keil, Gesenius, and others explain this name to signify "rock of smoothness"—from *chalak*, to be *smooth*, and hence *to slip away, to escape*. But the word also means to divide, and many expositors attach this meaning to it here because it separated Saul and David from each other.

Ver. 29. "Engedi." The present *Ainjiddy*, or *goat-fountain*, from the number of chamois which are found in the district. It is on the western shore of the Dead Sea, about thirteen miles north-west of Maon. "The steep mountains are intersected by wadys running down in deep ravines to the sea." *(Keil.)* "On all sides," says Robinson, "the country is full of caverns, which now serve as lurking-places for outlaws."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–6.

David Delivers Keilah.

I. The indulgence of enmity towards one makes men neglect their duty to the many. It is very dangerous for the passengers in a vessel if those in command are at enmity with each other, or if the captain is filled with envy of those who divide with him the responsibility of directing the ship. When such is the case, he is likely to be laying plans to injure the man whom he hates when he ought to be concerning himself about the safety of those committed to his care, and a storm, which ought to have found him well prepared, descends upon him unexpectedly, and places all the lives on board in jeopardy. His lawless hatred to one individual makes him forget what he owes to many. The warrior king of Israel at this time was so possessed by his enmity to David that he permitted one of his frontier towns to be threatened and the lives of its inhabitants to be endangered without making an effort on their behalf. How is it that his conduct on this occasion differs so widely from his prompt and brave action on behalf of Ramoth Gilead (chap. xi.) in the beginning of his reign, and why was the appeal for help at this time made to David and not to him? Was it not because the demon of envy had stifled his sense of duty and every generous and patriotic emotion? So long as he could satisfy his feelings of revenge against David he cared not if half his kingdom became a prey to the Philistines. His personal enmity to one man left no room for any concern about the welfare of the nation committed to his charge. This thing repeats itself from age to age. Men charged with heavy responsibilities in relation to their fellow-creatures allow a personal enmity to engross the energies which ought to be employed on their behalf, and myriads suffer on account of a quarrel between two individual men; or, as in the case before us, because one only is filled with a deadly hatred towards a supposed rival. And this devil of envy is not active merely among men who make no pretensions to godliness, or even to those who are mere pretenders. Envy at the promotion of a better man, and a desire, unconsciously indulged it may be, to lessen or extinguish his influence, has often led a shepherd of the flock of God to leave the sheep open to the attacks of their foes while he has been engaged in some private and personal quarrel.

II. In critical periods the want of faith on the part of the many gives an occasion for the display of faith on the part of one. The fearfulness and distrust of David's followers at the time bring into fuller relief the courage and faith of David himself, and it often happens in critical periods of human history that this is the case. When an eclipse of the sun is witnessed by men who are quite unacquainted with the laws of nature by which it is caused, it often fills them with distrust and fear, but such a phenomenon gives rise to no terror or doubt in the mind of one who is acquainted with natural laws. His superior knowledge keeps his faith in them unshaken during the crisis; he feels quite sure that the sun is still shining in all its glory, although it is hidden from human sight at the present moment. And the ignorant terror of the many make the enlightened confidence of the one the more striking. Something like

this often takes place in the region of God's providential workings. A dark dispensation overshadows a community, and men who are ignorant of the character of God and of the unchangeable nature of His moral laws are filled with fear, while those who have made themselves acquainted with the method and reasons of His dealings stay themselves upon His faithfulness, and are certain that His wisdom and love are as active in the cloudy day of adversity as when all looks bright and prosperous. And their faith shines all the more brightly because of the ignorance and unbelief all around them. So did the faith of David at this time in contrast with the distrust of his men. A common sense of wrong had drawn them to throw in their lot with him, but although they probably admired his courage they did not share it because they lacked the faith in God which he possessed. They looked only at the difficulties and dangers which surrounded them, and he looked through these difficulties and dangers to the God whom he knew and whom he therefore trusted.

III The faith and obedience of one good man in times of trial make him the refuge and the deliverer of many. When we are saddened and perplexed by looking at the misery which may come to many by the unfaithfulness of one man, we must remember also how much good also comes to many by the faithfulness of one. Although no man can transgress the laws of God without involving others in the consequences of his wrong-doing, no man can obey the Divine commands without being a blessing to many. If the people of Keilah were brought into danger by the sin of one man they owed their deliverance to the faith and obedience of one man, for no Israelitish army would have gone up against the Philistines at this time if the son of Jesse had not rallied his forces to the attack. This dependence of the destinies of the many upon the character of one has its bright, therefore, as well as its dark side.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 2. Had David been governed by personal considerations, he would have suffered the Philistines to take their course. It was occupation enough to defend *himself*,—to preserve his own life from the relentless malice that pursued him. Besides, the defence of the kingdom did not properly devolve on *him*, but on Saul, whom it might be policy to embarrass as much as possible in order to draw off his attention from the object of his bitter persecution. The more the country was left exposed to such attacks the more odious would Saul be rendered in the eyes of the people, and the more popular might David become. But he was a stranger to all such unworthy views. He saw his country invaded, and he thought no more of his own wrongs: he saw it distressed, and he determined if possible to relieve it, although he was thus strengthening the hands of his most virulent enemy.—*Lindsay.*

Ver. 3. David's difficulties were not over, though his personal anxieties were at an end when God's will was made known to him. He was not acting alone—he had four hundred men with him, most of them probably animated by a very different spirit from his. A leader of other men often finds his greatest difficulty not in deciding what should be done, but in prevailing upon them to do it. Especially is this the case if he be a spiritual man, and they carnal men; he bent on following the will of God, they the inclinations of their hearts. It is sad when such a division exists in families . . . and we know of no course which the godly head of a house, opposed by an unwilling family, could take with more advantage than that now taken by David. Let all be made to understand that the will of God is the rule by which he is resolved to act. Let him solemnly appeal to them, whether they are prepared to set up another; let him use the best means for ascertaining God's will, and then let him fearlessly go forward.—*Blaikie.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7–12.

Saul Marches Against Keilah to Seize David.

I. Men often put a false interpretation upon circumstances. Saul never made a greater mistake than when he said of David in Keilah, "God hath delivered him into mine hand." If this was indeed his belief, it shows us how very greatly men may err in their interpretation of the events of Providence, and how far they may be from a right conception of the light in which God regards both their character and their actions. It seems impossible that Saul could either have misunderstood or forgotten the word of the Lord delivered to him by Samuel; and yet he here speaks as though his pursuit of David was undertaken with the Divine approval, and puts an entirely false meaning upon his present position. When men misinterpret human language, they do so either through ignorance or wilfulness. A man who is but imperfectly acquainted with a language may put a false construction on words spoken or written, and so come to a false conclusion as to the intention of the speaker or writer. So sometimes men, through ignorance, misread God's providential dealings. Job's friends entirely misinterpreted the circumstances in which they found the patriarch, concluding that his afflictions were to punish his sin when they were to develop and strengthen his godliness; and other men, who have had no revelation from God, have often doubtless erred in like manner. But by far the most destructive and the greater number of such misinterpretations arise not from ignorance but from wilfulness, as was certainly the case with Saul at this time. Such a wilful mistake was made by the Egyptian host at the Red Sea, when they said of Israel "They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in." The miracles of judgment which had just been wrought in the land of Egypt spoke concerning the character and purposes of the Lord God of the Hebrews in language which could only be wilfully misinterpreted, and hence they had only themselves to blame for their destruction. But such misreadings of God's providential dealings have not been confined to Old Testament times. We need not wonder that they have been abundant in the history of the Christian Church, when we remember how men misinterpreted the death of Him who founded it, and concluded, when they saw Him hanging upon the cross, that "*Himself He could not save.*"

II. For a good man in such circumstances there is always a final court of appeal. A child when misjudged or perplexed goes to his father for a verdict or an explanation concerning that which troubles him. To his young mind the wisdom and the goodness resident in his parent constitute him the judge in all disputes, and the one who can solve all difficulties. Every good man thus instinctively turns to God when a wrong interpretation is put either upon his character or his circumstance, or upon both. Conscious of his own sincerity, and fully persuaded, even in the midst of his perplexities, of the wisdom and righteousness of his Heavenly Father, he looks heavenward for help and guidance when every human support fails him. Even Job, amid the terrible storm of afflictions which drew from him many expressions of impatience, and some which seem to impugn the justice of the Most High, ever and anon turns from the charges and expostulations of his mistaken human friends to Him whom he feels in his inmost soul is the final court of appeal, and the only Judge to whom he can safely commit his cause. So David here, perplexed no doubt by the providence which seemed to grow darker at every step, and pained at the ingratitude of the men upon whose gratitude and friendship he must surely have counted, turns again and again to his Father in heaven, and by his appeals and inquiries

shows that, although the waves and the billows of adversity are all around him, his faith has not lost her hold, and that he can still hear the "*voice of the Lord upon the waters,*" and see Him "*sitting on the flood*" (Psalm xxix).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The men of Keilah were neither chivalrous nor grateful. They regarded their own interests as supreme. Like many in our own day, they might profess to aim after the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but when you came to analyse their views, you would find that with them, to use the words of Joseph Hume, "the greatest number was number one!" It was not for their advantage to serve David, and they did not serve him; and I am free to say that all my observation and experience convince me that a large proportion of the present generation would have done as they were willing to do. Of course that does not excuse them, but it should make us cautious as to what we say in their condemnation, lest, haply, we may some day be judged out of our own mouths. Gratitude, chivalry, enthusiasm for the cause of the wronged—what are these words in the mouths of many to-day but words? they sound well, and they are very fine so long as they cost nothing; but let adherence to them put property or life in peril, and too many would cling to the property and the life, and let the others go. Ye who condemn the inhabitants of Keilah because they were willing to betray David, how long would you show gratitude at the risk of the loss of all things? It was a disgrace to them that they would not stand by him who had delivered them; but is it anything less to us, when we allow our worldly interests to blind us to the obligations under which we lie to those who befriended us in our time of need? Is it anything less to us when, for the sake of fashion, or fortune, or fame, we turn our backs upon the Christ, who has borne the agony of Gethsemane and Calvary on our behalf? Idolatry of self is as hideous now as it was in David's time. Let those who are guilty of it, therefore, look here, and, in the pitiful poltroonery of the men of Keilah they will see how mean and contemptible they look.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Ver. 12. Here is a second inquiry. God loveth to be often sought unto by His praying people (Luke xviii. 1), and therefore answereth them by degrees, that He may frequently hear from them. Thus the cloud empties not itself at a sudden burst, but dissolveth upon the earth drop after drop. *Trapp.*

Whereas the Lord answereth, that Saul would come down to Keilah, and that the men of Keilah would deliver David into Saul's hands, and yet neither of these came to pass; hence it cannot be inferred that the predictions of the Lord are uncertain, for the Lord's answer is here to be understood conditionally. . . . A difference is here to be made between the prescience of God and the predestination: for the Lord as well seeth what shall be done as what is likely to be done in respect of the second causes; but His decree of predestination is only of those things which shall most certainly be effected.—*Willet.*

The origin of the thirty-first Psalm is to be traced to this period of wandering, although there is nothing contained in the title of it which authorises this supposition. We meet, however, with many passages in the psalm which quite correspond with the circumstances in which David was then placed. The singer begins with the humble but confiding prayer that God would never let him be put to shame (he was so at that time, when the citizens of Keilah would no longer suffer him to dwell amongst them); but that he would deliver him (the guiltless outlaw) in his righteousness. He prays that the Lord would bow down His ear to him, and deliver him speedily, and

be a strong rock to him, and a protecting fortress. The imagery here is plainly suggested by the wild scenes of nature which surrounded the singer. He prays that, for his name's sake, the Lord would lead him and graciously be near him in the pathless and inhospitable wilderness, and that he would guard his feet from the net which they had laid on all sides to catch him. "Into thine hand," he continues, "I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth," namely, from the violence to which they would surrender me. Moreover, David speaks of himself as one who was forsaken by all the world, and was covered with unmerited reproaches and slanders. He was even guilty of high treason, and had placed himself in opposition to the greatest part of the people, because he was the object of the king's displeasure. Yet he is far from speaking of himself as free from all guilt. He feels himself as a poor sinner before God, and, with a sigh, gives utterance to the prayer, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord." Nevertheless he trusted in His mercy whom he confidently called his God; and, after giving praise to the Lord for all the wonderful goodness and the help which he had hitherto vouchsafed to him "in his flight," he concludes with this call to his brethren in the faith: "O love the Lord, all ye his saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."—*Krummacher.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13-18.

JONATHAN'S VISIT TO DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS OF ZIPH.

We have here—

I. A man in the sorest need of human friendship. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the need in which David stood at this time of human sympathy. It has been often said that nothing gives a human spirit so much pain as ingratitude, and David was now proving how ungrateful men can be when prompted by motives of self-interest. He had just saved the inhabitants of Keilah from a great calamity, and if he looked for some active proof of their good will on his behalf, it was certainly not expecting very much. He might have reasonably counted on their help when his hour of need came; and when he became aware that this would not be given he would have hardly thought it possible for them to go beyond a cowardly neutrality. But the Divine oracle had assured him that these base specimens of humanity were prepared to deliver him up into the hands of the king at his command. Such an experience as this tests to the utmost a man's faith in humanity, and more than anything else tends to harden the heart and embitter the spirit. And when it has this effect, it does not bring the soul nearer to God. A true and tender human friend at such a time will often make it easier for a man to believe in Divine faithfulness and compassion, and form the link between a broken spirit and the Great Healer. David evidently needed such a friend at this moment.

II. A friend fully equal to the needs of friendship. If the treachery of the men of Keilah was sufficient almost to destroy David's faith in his fellow-men, the stedfastness of Jonathan was a more weighty influence on the other side. A feebler friendship might have satisfied itself with the remembrance of having given proofs of love in the past, or at least with sending to David an assurance of present sympathy; but Jonathan's self-sacrificing love embraced every occasion of serving his friend to the utmost of his power, and hence he is found in person in the wilderness with the outlaw whom his father seeks, and cheers David by putting him in mind of the declared purpose of God concerning him, although it included his own loss of worldly power and influence. When David

received this new assurance of his friend's unselfish and undying regard, it must surely have driven away all the mistrust in God which was making him fear; for if a man of like passions with himself would be thus true to his plighted word, he would not dare to harbour the thought that Jonathan's God and his own God would fail him.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver 16. The distinguishing power of a true man. What is the distinguishing power which a true man has? To *destroy* life? Brutes can do this. To weaken faith, and shake confidence? A child can do this. What then? *To strengthen a brother's heart in God!* . . . But how can a true man strengthen a depressed brother thus? First: *By a truthful exposition of God's method of governing the fallen in this world.* The gospel unfolds that method; shows that it is to the true corrective, not penal; remedial, not destructive; introductory, not final. . . Secondly: *By a practical expression of genuine sympathy.* Nothing in the world is more strengthening to a tried soul than the practical manifestation of true sympathy. One breath of it infuses new life to the soul—energizes the heart. Thirdly: *By a devout intercession with heaven.* Paul prayed that the Ephesians might be "strengthened with all might in the inner man." **The highest function of a true friend.** It is one thing to have the power to strengthen, and another thing to use it when and where required. He who uses it is the truest friend. Jonathan proved his friendship to David by tracking him out in the lonely wood, and there, in the depths of solitude, in the sanctuary of wild, majestic nature, in-breathing invigorating thoughts about God. Let us, in imagination, go into this wood and see Jonathan acting the friend. He meets David, with a heavy gloom upon his brow, only able to speak in sighs and tears. First, perhaps, Jonathan makes a few consolatory remarks about the great providence of God. Then, secondly, perhaps he refers him to the trials of good men who have passed away—Abraham and Jacob, Moses and Samuel. Then, thirdly, perhaps he reminds him of the past kindness of God to him as an individual. . . . . And then perhaps he kneels down under the shadow of some old tree and prays with him and for him. This is the way to strengthen souls, and he is the true man who acts thus.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

Ver. 17. It was doubtless well ordered by God's good providence that Jonathan's noble sentiments were not subjected to the unnatural strain of such a situation, but that he died a soldier's death, fighting gallantly for his country, before anything had happened to disturb the perfect beauty of his friendship for David.—*Biblical Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19—29.

The Treachery of the Ziphites.

I. The calamity of one man an occasion of revealing the baseness of others. There is much latent baseness in the world which only lacks a favourable opportunity to manifest itself. Fear of punishment or defeat is at the root of the outwardly virtuous conduct of many men, and they only need to have these restraints removed to show what they really are. Occasion is to men what the barometer is to the weather. This instrument only registers the state of the atmosphere, but has no part in generating either the calm or the storm—they would be the same if the indicator had no existence. These men of Ziph were not worse men when they betrayed David than they had been before, but his defence-

less and straitened condition was the occasion which tested their character and revealed their baseness. If he had simply come to them as a man in distress through no fault of his own it would have been a pitiful meanness on their part to betray him. But they could not be ignorant of the debt of gratitude they, in common with the rest of their countrymen, owed to him. Since the day when he slew the Philistine whose name spread terror through all the hosts of Israel, he had again and again defeated their much-dreaded foes, and at this moment had just returned from delivering Keilah. His life since his early youth had been spent in the service of his country, and if the Ziphites had possessed a spark of gratitude they would have striven to lighten his hardships. But, far from doing this, they went out of their way to betray, not only an innocent man, but one to whom they were deeply indebted. This one act is an infallible and a sufficient revelation of their character as a community.

II. **The evil purposes of evil men defeated by others of a like character.** Doubtless the Ziphites thought the success of their plan was certain; and Saul must have felt assured that this time his prey would not escape. And as his enemies closed around him, David himself must have well nigh given up all hope of escape. But at this critical moment his deliverance was wrought by men who had every reason to desire his downfall, and who would have gladly taken his life if they had found an opportunity to do so. The Philistines certainly hated David as much as the Ziphites did, but at this moment they unconsciously delivered him from the danger to which the treachery of the latter had exposed him. The incident affords an example of the way in which bad men often unconsciously fulfil the purposes of God, and frustrate the plans of those who are one with them in their opposition to righteousness. Saul suddenly found himself in the hands of circumstances which compelled him to forego for this time the satisfaction of his private jealousy, and thus this bad monarch, and his equally bad subjects, were prevented from taking the blood of an innocent man by other men as bad as themselves. But behind all these human wills and purposes a Divine will and a Divine purpose were in operation, and God was using His enemies to save His servant.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

At the time when David received tidings that the Ziphites had betrayed him, his soul poured itself forth in the fifty-fourth Psalm. Here he first directs his eye from the earth, where faithlessness and wickedness so much surrounded him, upwards to heaven, and prays to God that He would save and judge him (*i.e.* justify him), since the people of his own tribe had risen up against him as enemies, yea, like the heathen. But not less does he give utterance to his confidence, that the Lord would be his helper and would uphold his soul, and that the wickedness of his enemies would recoil upon themselves. "Cut them off in Thy truth," he cries out; adding, "I will freely sacrifice unto Thee; I will praise Thy name, O Lord, for it is good;" and concludes with the words of joyful confidence, "For He hath delivered me out of all trouble; and mine eye hath seen His desire upon mine enemies."—*Krummacher.*

CHAPTER XXIV.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 2. "**Rocks of the wild goats,**" or *Ibex-rocks.* Probably not a name for any particular rock, but a general term applied to the locality on account of the number of ibexes, or wild goats, found there.

Ver. 3. "**Sheepcotes.**" These are still to be seen at the mouth of the caves in this region, and are made by piling up stones in a circle and covering them with thorns. "**To cover his feet,**" *i.e.*, to obey a call of nature, when Orientals usually cover their feet. (*Keil, Erdmann,* and others.) There are many caves in this district where men might easily remain concealed from the view of a person entering. "The largest cave," says Lieut. Lynch (American Exploration of the Dead Sea), "that we entered at Engedi could contain thirty men, and has a long low and narrow gallery running from one side, which would be invisible when the sun does not shine through the entrance."

Ver. 4. "**Behold the day,**" etc. "This can here be understood only in the general sense of the Divine ordering of a favourable opportunity. A reference to a definite Divine declaration is not in the words themselves. Some cite 1 Sam. xvi. 28; xvi. 1-12; and also xx. 15; xxiii. 17; but it is not probable that David's men would know this. Of any other promise we have no mention." (*Lange's Commentary.*) "**Saul's robe.**" His long outer mantle (*meil*), probably laid aside by Saul when he entered the cave.

Ver. 6. "**The Lord forbid.**" Literally, "far be it from me from Jehovah," *i.e.*, on Jehovah's account. "It is a religious ground which restrains David." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 8. The closeness of the precipitous rocks and the depth of the ravines or wadies between them, together with the remarkable purity of the air, made it quite easy for David thus to converse with Saul at a distance sufficient to ensure his own safety. "**My lord the King.**" "This address indicates the double point of view whence David, in what follows, declares by *deed* and by *word* his relation and attitude to Saul. He recognises and honours Saul as *his lord* to whom he is bound to be subject; in calling him *lord* he declares himself guiltless of insurrection against him. In the *king* he sees the *anointed* of the Lord, the bearer of the holy theocratic office, in which character he was inviolable." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 13. "**As saith the proverb,**" etc. "The meaning is, only a wicked man would wish to avenge himself, I do not." (*Keil.*) "A prophetic speech. Thy death will not be from me, who have no such thoughts, but from the wicked. And so it was. Saul perished by his own wicked hand." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 14. "**A flea.**" Literally, *a single flea.* "By these similes David meant to describe himself as a perfectly harmless and insignificant man, of whom Saul had no occasion to be afraid, and whom it was beneath his dignity to pursue." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 16. "**And Saul lifted up his voice.**" "There is no hypocrisy or pretence here. Saul, tossed powerless hither and thither by fierce passions and without harmony of soul-life, is here laid hold of in a hidden corner of his heart, where he was still accessible to the power of truth, and involuntarily yields to this nobler arousing of his soul, though it is not destined to be permanent." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 20. "How did Saul come to this *knowledge* which he here expresses, and which Jonathan had already affirmed that his father had? (xxiii. 17.) Not through direct Divine revelation, but by the observation that all his undertakings against David were unsuccessful, and that David, in respect to his persecutions, was under special Divine protection, coupled with the recollection of what Samuel had once said to him in the name of God respecting his rejection for disobedience." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 21. "**My name,**" etc. "A name is exterminated when the whole of the descendants are destroyed—a thing of frequent occurrence in the East in connection with a change of dynasties, and one which occurred again and again even in the kingdom of the ten tribes. See 1 Kings xv. 28 sqq.; xvi. 11 sqq.; 2 Kings x." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 22. "**The hold.**" "The word here so translated is used to denote the mountainous part of the desert of Judah. It is different in chap. xxii. 5." (*Keil.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-7.

DAVID SPARES SAUL IN THE CAVE.

I. Here is an example of the power of hatred to sustain the zeal of the wicked. We often speak of the power of righteous convictions and emotions to sustain men in a course of righteous action in the face of much opposition and many

defeats, and we rejoice to think that history furnishes us with many bright illustrations of this truth. But we cannot deny that wicked men have also shown much courage and patience in the pursuit of their evil designs, impelled by the power of evil passions and principles. And of all these passions, perhaps hatred, and especially hatred of those whom the hater has wronged, is the most potent. This is the motive power that keeps alive the zealous activity of the great adversary of the human race. Satan first wronged man by tempting him to sin, and throughout all the ages since has been unceasing in his hatred to the creatures whom he has wronged and untiring in his efforts to compass their ruin. Such a passion possessed Saul at this time. His hatred of David was not appeased by the wrong which he had done him in the past, but seemed to gather strength with every fresh crime committed against him, and sustained him in his purpose to take his life if possible, notwithstanding all the checks and hindrances hitherto received. Since the day when he mistrusted David's motive of action in the defeat of Goliath, he had found in his malice inspiration sufficient to keep him ever eager to compass his destruction, and he could not have set about this new pursuit with more determination and energy if God, instead of having constantly checkmated him in the past, had given him a Divine commission to seek and to destroy the son of Jesse. The untiring zeal of such a man under the influence of such a motive, ought to read a lesson to all who, professing to be animated by love to men and zeal for righteousness, often become weary and faint-hearted if they meet with repeated disappointments.

II. An example of the power of faith in God to abide God's time of vindication. To a man who harboured a spirit of revenge such an opportunity as now presented itself to David to take the life of his adversary could hardly have been resisted. But revenge and retaliation are more frequently found in alliance with guilt than with innocence. The man who is wrongfully accused is generally more ready to forgive his accuser than the man who is guilty of the crime laid to his charge, because the latter is, as a rule, more likely to be governed by passion, and the former to be ruled by conscience. But the temptation here presented to David by the peculiar circumstances of the case, and seconded by the persuasions of his followers, did not take the form of an act of private revenge. We do not know what took place in David's spirit when he found Saul so completely in his power, but if there arose within him any sudden impulse to take action against his persecutor, we may safely conclude that it sought to justify itself on the same ground as that urged by his men, viz., that in so doing he would be only taking a lawful advantage of a remarkable providence. And it was this which formed the strength of the temptation. As we saw in the preceding chapter (see on verses 7 to 12) men are at all times prone to interpret circumstances in accordance with their own inclinations, rather than by the light of Divine laws, and nothing but a strong faith in God could have saved David at this time from falling into this snare. The man who was now at his mercy was avowedly seeking his life, and might it not therefore be lawful to slay him in self-defence, nay, might he not have been given into his hand for this very purpose? This was not the argument of one man only, but of many, and numbers strengthen the weight of argument. Then David knew, what his men did not know, that he was also the anointed of the Lord, and was destined by Jehovah to succeed Saul as king of Israel. Was not the time now come when by Saul's death peace might be restored to the kingdom which he neglected to gratify his private enmity? And would not David bring a blessing to the entire nation by executing the sentence which had long since been pronounced against the man who had proved so faithless to the great trust committed to him? Such questions and arguments from within and without came up for solution in the short space of time given to David for decision, but a man who, like David, lives a life of dependence upon God and of confidence

in Him, does not find it so difficult after all to find out what he ought to do and to do it. The key to David's conduct in these circumstances is found in his firm persuasion that his cause was in the hands of the Divine and Righteous Ruler of all men, who would not suffer wrong to prevail over right in the end. "*The Lord judge between me and thee, and see and plead my cause.*" This was the shield of faith upon which David turned aside the darts of temptation which now assailed him.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 3. If Saul had known his own opportunities, how David and his men had interred themselves, he had saved a treble labour of chase, of execution, and burial; for had he but stopped the mouth of that cave, his enemies had laid themselves down in their own graves. The wisdom of God thinks fit to hide from evil men and spirits those means and seasons which might be, if they had been taken, most prejudicial to his own. We had been oft foiled if Satan could but have known our hearts. Sometimes we lie open to evils, and happy it is for us that He only knows it who pities instead of tempting us. *Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 4. *Providential purpose, apparent and real.* 1. What was here the apparent purpose of God? To give an injured man the opportunity of delivering and avenging himself. . . 2. How did he know that such could not be the purpose of Providence? Because it would involve his doing what would be *wrong in itself.* An enlightened and tender conscience must check our interpretations of Providence. 3. What was the real Providential purpose? As usual, it was manifold: we can see the following points; (*a*). To make him more conscientious by obeying conscience under sore temptation (vers. 5 and 6). (*b*). To present a noble example to his rude followers and the people at large (vers. 6, 10). (*c*). To furnish a most convincing proof that he was wrongly accused (vers. 9-11). (*d*). To give him ground for a confident appeal to Providence in future (ver. 12 sq.; comp. chap. xxvi. 23-24). (*e*). To heighten his reputation for loyalty and magnanimity, and smooth the way to his finally becoming king.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 5. His conscience, which keeps court in every faculty of the soul, checked him, such was his tenderness then. Bee-masters tell us that those are the best hives that make the greatest noise; so is that the best conscience that checketh for the smallest sins. Good men are afraid of the least show of sin, being jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 7. Revenge is unquestionably one of the strongest and most impetuous, as it is plainly one of the darkest passions in the heart of man. Of all the tragedies of which this earth has been the scene, the wildest have sprung from the exercise of revenge; of all the crimes that have disgraced humanity, the darkest have had this foul passion for their mother; and perhaps the bitterest remorse with which man's bosom has ever been torn, is that which has followed the deeds of revenge. Dark and dreadful, too, though this passion be, nothing comes less welcome than the call to check it; and once it is fairly roused, life itself would often be parted with more readily than the savage gratification which it craves. Nowhere have its frightful fruits been more clearly shown than in that beautiful island of the Mediterranean celebrated as the birthplace of the first Napoleon. For hundreds of years Corsica has sustained a lofty reputation for its patriotism and dauntless valour; age after age has produced fresh crops of heroes, worthy of being ranked with those of any land; but in spite of the richness of its soil, the beauty of its climate, and the fearless spirit of its people, the country is most miserable; its plains are uncultivated, its inhabitants are kept in constant misery by

family feuds that never heal, and that are constantly breaking out with fresh vehemence, through the influence of an organised system of revenge, that under the name of the *vendetta* has become one of the institutions of the country. . . . It is only when we think of such awful fruits of the spirit of revenge that we become truly alive to the singular excellence of the spirit of forbearance which David remarkably displayed. We see the striking contrast between nature and grace—between the heart of man as sin has made it, and the heart of man as grace renews it. . . . Yet while we freely award the tribute of admiration, let us not forget that the field is one upon which similar victories are always to be won.—*Blackie.*

Ver. 8. David follows Saul from the cave more joyous now than after the conquest of Goliath. Indeed, this last victory was the more glorious one—the spoils were more precious, the trophies more honourable. Then, he had needed a sling, stones, and battle array; this time his reason had been a sufficient weapon—without arms he had won the victory, without having shed blood he had erected the trophy. He came forth, therefore, not carrying the head of a Philistine, but a mortified heart, a conquered anger; and it was not to Jerusalem that he consecrated his spoils, but to heaven, to the city on high. We see no women coming forth to meet him with songs of praise, but the angels applauded his deed and admired his wisdom and piety. For he returned after having given many wounds to his adversary; not to Saul, whom he had saved, but to his real enemy, the devil, whom he had pierced through with many thrusts. For as our anger and lust and our mutual collisions rejoice the devil, so peace and concord and victory over passion grieve and conquer him who hates peace and is the father of jealousy. David comes forth, then, from the cavern with a crown upon his head . . it is not the diadem of Saul, but the crown of justice which adorns him—it is not the royal purple which enwraps him, but a wisdom more than human, before which the most gorgeous robe becomes pale.—*Chrysostom.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8-15.

David's Vindication of Himself to Saul.

I. This vindication of David reveals that he still considered himself a subject of the king of Israel. The best and wisest men are always the least ready to rebel against those in authority, and their obedience will stand a much more severe test than that of men who are their inferiors in character and ability. A son who is far above his father in excellence and wisdom will be far more loyal to his weak and erring parent than one who is like him in character, and a subject who is morally and intellectually superior to his ruler will bear more before he renounces his allegiance than one who is less intelligent and godly. Noble and good men in all ages have been tried both in their public and private relationships by the incapacity and wickedness of those in authority over them, and it has sometimes become their duty to disown such authority and renounce their allegiance to such rule, but this is a step that is taken with the most reluctance by the men who seem to have the most right to take it. It seems to us, when we read this history, that of all the men in Israel at this time, David was the least bound to acknowledge Saul as his lord and king. No man in the kingdom had deserved Saul's gratitude so much and none had received such ingratitude and cruelty at his hand. Yet David's mode of address here shows him still acknowledging himself Saul's subject, and reveals that he had only taken arms in self-defence, and not in defiance. The spirit of this

Old Testament servant of God was the same as that which animated the apostles and martyrs of the Christian Church (Rom. xiii. 1; Titus iii. 1), and had its root in the same recognition of God as the Supreme Ruler and Judge of all men.

II. His conduct shows that he considered Saul's position worthy of outward tokens of respect. When it is impossible to respect a man for what he is, we may sometimes feel bound to honour him for what he has been, or for what he now represents. A heap of ruined stones may have nothing in their present appearance to awaken interest, but if they are the remains of a city once famous for its beauty, thinking men cannot look at them without emotion. Or a building which has never had any pretensions to architectural beauty may awaken a feeling almost of reverence because it represents something of far more value and dignity than itself. So when David bowed himself before Saul it could hardly have been in token of respect for any moral excellence now found in him, but must have rather been in honour of what he once was and of what he even now represented. He was still the Lord's anointed—the man whom God had Himself appointed to rule over His people Israel, and there had been a time when he had seemed not unworthy of the honour thus put upon him. And David, like every other godly man, was ever ready to render honour wherever it was due, whether to place or person, whether to individual excellence or to "powers ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1.)

III. Yet David's vindication contains an appeal to Saul's reason and to God's justice. Reverence for Saul as a king, and a sense of his own duty as a subject, did not degenerate into that servility which seems to ignore the fact that the higher the position the greater the obligation, and to forget that there is a Judge before whose bar all human distinctions fade away. David did not think it incompatible with his acknowledgment of Saul as his lord to remonstrate with him on his foolishness, and to remind him that there was a King to whom both the persecutor and the persecuted would have to render an account, and whose judgment would certainly be according to truth. The most genuine loyalty is always found associated with self-respect and with faith in God, and they are the most faithful servants of kings who do not fear to show them wherein they err, and who can with confidence commit their cause to Him who will one day certainly render every man according to his works. For neither of the two causes, one or the other of which sometimes operates in the decisions of a human judge and leads him to pronounce an unjust sentence, can ever have any place in the Divine administration. A man may condemn the innocent or justify the guilty through ignorance, or from wickedness. He may not be acquainted with all the facts of the case, or some selfish or other evil motive may lead him to pronounce a false verdict. But it is the joy of every lover of truth and righteousness to know that this can never be the case with God. He who searches and knows everyone of His creatures can never be mistaken in His judgment, and He who is infinitely above them, both in nature and in character, can have no motive or desire to wrong anyone of them in the smallest degree. Hence the assurance with which men in all ages have turned to Him when they have been wronged by their fellow-creatures, and have said, with David, "*The Lord, therefore, be judge, and see, and plead my cause.*"

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 10. It by no means follows that all kings are God's lieutenants in the sense in which Saul was, or lie under the same sacred charm of divine anointing. God does not stand in the same special relation to other nations as he did to the Jews. Magistracy is still the ordinance of God, but it is left

to communities to choose both the form of government and the individuals who are to exercise it. Nations have power to choose their governors, and, unless there be a special arrangement to the contrary, they have power to discontinue them. . . . Thus viewed, the consideration that influenced David resolves itself into a principle of wider application. It was the fruit of that profound reverence for God's will, and that thorough confidence in God's providential government, and in the holy principles on which it is conducted, that characterised David in all his better periods and that will ever characterise the humble and consistent Christian.—*Blaikie.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16—22.

The Effect of David's Conduct upon Saul.

I. Here is a righteous emotion and a sincere confession of sin produced by godlike conduct. The ice upon the lake may be very strong and thick, but there is a strength of sunlight that will dissolve it; and the iron may be very hard and cold, but there is an intensity of heat that will make it glow and even melt it. So the conscience may be as it were frozen over by indulgence in some evil passion, and all the soul hardened by a long course of sin; but there are manifestations of goodness that will melt the stubborn will, and awaken into life the better part of the man although it may be only for a season. Circumstances sometimes bring such a man into such contact with a godly character that he cannot avoid seeing the contrast between what he is and what he might and ought to be; and the effect of the vision is to awaken a feeling of contrition, and it may be to extort from him a confession of his guilt. Such a time now came to Saul. The feeling of jealousy against David had gained such an ascendancy in his soul as to stifle all his better feelings, and even the voices of reason and conscience; but this meeting, and David's godlike behaviour, caused him for a moment to see himself in a true light, and to discern how great a gulf of character there was between him and the man whom he was hating even unto blood. For a short season the magnanimity of David asserted its power over his pitiless foe, and melted him into contrition and confession.

II. But this righteous emotion and sincere confession failed to produce true repentance. Where there is beautiful blossom we may hope in due time to see the fruit, and whenever we rejoice over the ripened fruit we know it began with the blossom, but the blossom is not the fruit, and we know that, alas, many a fair blossom fails to bring forth that which it seems to promise. So is it with contrition for sin and sincere repentance, the one must precede the other, and when we see the first we hope it may prove to be that *godly sorrow which worketh repentance* (2 Cor. vii. 10). But we know that it is not always so, and Saul's conduct here and on a subsequent occasion shows how even strong and sincere emotion may be felt and yet not pass into life and action, and so fail to benefit the character and even make repentance more difficult. Every conviction of sin which leaves the man no better than before does not leave him as it found him, but in a worse condition, even as the bar of iron which has been in the furnace is harder than one which has never yet been heated.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 16. What change is this that takes place all at once? He who but lately could not bring himself to mention David's name (chap. xxii. 7)—who hated even his name—makes him one of his family by calling him his son!

What more happy fortune than that which now befel David, who transforms his would-be murderer into his father, who changes the wolf into the lamb, who is able to extinguish this angry conflagration, to make a calm succeed the tempest, and to heal this fever of passion in the soul? David's words had brought about this revolution. Saul says not, "It is thou who speakest, my son David," but "*It is thy voice, my son David,*" for the mere sound of his voice was enough to soften him. And as a father, who, after a long absence, hears the voice of his child, needs not to see him to be awakened to emotion, so Saul, after the words of David penetrating his heart, chased away his hatred, recognised in David the man of God, and, cured of his evil passion, felt himself possessed by another emotion; his malice had disappeared, and joy and affection had taken its place. Just as in the darkness of night we do not perceive the presence of our friend, but when the daylight comes we recognise him even afar off, so while we are evilly disposed towards each other, we listen to each other's words, and look upon one another in the spirit of prejudice, but when we are cured of our malice, the voice which before sounded harsh and angry becomes soft and pleasant to our ears, and the countenance which seemed repulsive and unwelcome is now lovely and attractive. —*Abridged from Chrysostom.*

Ver. 17. He should have said, *Thou art righteous,* but I am wicked; but the utmost he will own is this, *Thou art more righteous than I.* Bad men will commonly go no further than this in their confessions; they will own they are not so good as some others are; there are those that are better than they and more righteous.—*Henry.*

Ver. 18. Saul for the present spake as he thought. But good thoughts make but a thoroughfare of wicked hearts: they stay not there, as those that like not their lodging.—*Trapp.*

Saul's sense of David's generosity must be very strong when he beseeches God to reward it. Indeed, Saul had no equivalent to give David for the kindness shown him, and therefore he refers him to God for retribution. For if, after this, he should even save David's life, yet still he could only save the life of his best benefactor, whereas David both spared and saved the life of his most mortal enemy.—*Delany.*

CHAPTER XXV.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**And Samuel died.**" Josephus says that "Samuel governed and presided over the people alone, after the death of Eli, twelve years, and eighteen years in conjunction with Saul, the king." He likewise adds, "They wept for him a very great number of days, not looking on it as a sorrow for the death of another man, but as that in which they were everyone of themselves concerned. He was a righteous man, and gentle in his nature, and on that account he was very dear to God." "**In his house,**" *i.e.*, in a court or garden attached to his house. "Every respectable family in the East still has its own house of the dead, and often this is in a little detached garden, consisting of a small stone building, where there is no rock, resembling a house. It has neither door nor window. (Cf. 1 Kings ii. 34; Job xxx. 23.) (*Jamieson.*) "**David arose,**" etc. It might be that David felt himself in more danger now that the restraint which Samuel might have exercised over Saul was removed, or, as *Keil* suggests, the wilderness of Judah might no longer afford sustenance to him and his large body of six hundred men. The *wilderness of Paran* seems to have been a somewhat undefined tract of country extending from the southern border of Canaan to the Sinaitic desert on the south, the wilderness of Shur on the west, and the territory of Edom on the east. The examination of the various Scripture references to this region seems to show that the term was sometimes used for the entire wilderness tract of this district. (*See Smith's Biblical Dictionary.*)

Ver. 2. "**Maon.**" A city of Judah (Josh. xv. 55), situated on a hill now called *Tell Ma'in*, about seven or eight miles south of Hebron. It is now in ruins. "**Carmel.**" This word literally means a fertile region, and is applied also to the promontory on the north-east of Palestine, famous in the history of Elijah. The place here so named is the present *Kurmul* and its neighbourhood, about a mile north-west of Maon. David had before taken shelter near Maon. (See the notes on chapter xxiii. 24.)

Ver. 3. "**Nabal,**" *i.e.*, fool. (See ver. 25.) Keil thinks it could hardly have been this man's proper name, but was a popular designation on account of his folly. "**Of the house of Caleb.**" Literally he was a Calebite (*Wordsworth*), and as the word means "*a dog man*," and Josephus, among others, understand it to mean "a doggish, cynical man. But Caleb's possession lay in this region, and, as *Erdmann* remarks, the two former statements sufficiently characterise his disposition, and a third would be out of keeping with the simplicity of the description. Moreover, "the statement of his origin accords with this importance, as a man 'great' by his riches, and it is introduced as something new by the words 'and he,' which would not suit the continuation of his moral portraiture." We may therefore conclude that Nabal was descended from the ancient hero of Israel, and he was, then, of the same tribe as David.

Ver. 5. "**Go to Nabal and greet him,**" etc. "In all these particulars, when we were at Kermul and were in the midst of scenes memorable for the adventures of David, we were deeply struck with the truth and strength of the biblical description of manners and customs, almost identically the same as those that exist at the present day. On such a festive occasion as a sheepshearing near a town or village, an Arab Sheikh of the neighbouring desert would hardly fail to put in a word either in person or by message, and his message would be a transcript of that of David to Nabal." (*Dr. Robinson.*)

Ver. 6. "**To him that liveth.**" The words *in prosperity* it will be seen are supplied by our translators. The Hebrew phrase is obscure and has been very variously rendered, but the most satisfactory explanation seems to be that in which the word translated *liveth* is taken as a substantive, and the whole understood as a salutation. So Keil, Luther, etc.

Ver. 7. "**Neither was there aught missing,**" etc. "These words may refer to the protection afforded the herdsmen by David's people against the predatory desert tribes; for such protection against thieving attacks (which came expressly from the south) is expressly affirmed in verses 16, 21. (*Erdmann.*) "Thus, even in his outlawry, David showed himself the protector of his people." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 8. *A good day, i.e.*, a festive day. Sheepshearing was conducted as a festival (comp. Gen. xxxviii. 12; 2 Sam. xiii. 23), when strangers and the poor were feasted.

Ver. 9. "**Ceased,**" rather, *rested* or *sat down*, to await the fulfilment of their request.

Ver. 11. "**My bread and my water,**" etc. "The mention of water indicates a country where water was scarce. Compare the earnestness with which Caleb's daughter in this very country begged of her father the springs of water." Josh. xv. 19. (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 18. "**Bottles,**" *i.e.*, goatskins, capable of holding a large quantity. "**Clusters of raisins,**" rather, raisin cakes. "**Fig cakes,**" "pressed figs joined together." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 20. "**By the covert.**" "Probably a hollow between two peaks of a mountain. This would explain the use of the word *to come down*, with reference both to Abigail, who approached on one side, and David, who came on the other." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 22. "This oath, in which the punishment of God is not called down upon the swearer himself (God do so to *me*), as it generally is, but upon the enemies of David, is analogous to that in chap. iii. 17, where punishment is threatened upon the person addressed, who is there made to swear; except that here, as the oath could not be uttered in the ears of the person addressed, upon whom it was to fall, the enemies generally are mentioned instead of *to thee*. There is no doubt, therefore, as to the correctness of the text." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 26. "**Let thine enemies,**" etc. "That is, thou standest under God's protection and guidance, so that all who as thine enemies will, like Nabal, do thee evil, shall, like him, become fools and fall under God's punishment." (*Erdmann.*) "She reminds David of the promise of God. Not that she prophesies, but that she has gathered it from the general promises of the word of God. The promise referred to is that whoever does good to his enemies and takes no vengeance upon them, God Himself will avenge him upon his enemies, according to the saying, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay.*" (*Seb. Schmidt.*)

Ver. 28. "**Evil hath not been found,**" *i.e.*, misfortune, not wickedness; that thought is not expressed until verse 31.

Ver. 29. "**Bundle of life,**" rather, the bundle of *the living*. "The metaphor is taken from the custom of binding up valuable things in a bundle to prevent their being injured." *(Keil.)* "**The middle of the sling,**" literally, *the cup of the sling*, the cavity in which the stone was placed. This figure is adopted in Jer. x. 18, "I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once." *(Wordsworth.)*

Ver. 30. "**When the Lord shall have done.**" "From these words it appears to follow that Abigail had received certain information of the anointing of David, and his designation to be the future king, probably through Samuel or one of the pupils of the prophets. There is nothing to preclude this assumption, even if it cannot be historically sustained. Abigail manifests such an advance and maturity in the life of faith as could only have been derived from intercourse with the prophets. It is expressly stated with regard to Elijah and Elisha, that at certain times the pious assembled together around the prophets. What prevents us from assuming the same with regard to Samuel? The absence of any distinct testimony to that effect is amply compensated for by the brief, and for the most part casual notices that are given of the influence which Samuel exerted upon all Israel." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 31. "**That this shall be no grief unto thee.**" "Like a wise woman, she reserves her strongest arguments till the last." *(Wordsworth.)*

Ver. 36. "**Merry with him,**" literally, *therewith*, *i.e.*, on account of the feast.

Ver. 37. "**A stone.**" Anger, or fear, or both combined with the excesses of the debauch, probably brought on a stroke of apoplexy, although his subsequent death is said to have been by the hand of the Lord (ver. 38).

Ver. 39. "**Pleaded the cause,**" etc. "The figure is of a case in law, which is settled by the judicial decision. The '*law-cause of my reproach*,' that is, the reproach offered to me, on account of which the Lord had to appear against Nabal as Judge and Avenger. Connect 'from the hand' with 'pleaded,' not with 'my reproach,' and render pregnantly '*he has conducted my cause to a conclusion out of the hand*,' that is, he has collected the costs from the condemned person, and has settled the matter by the infliction of the proper punishment." *(Erdmann.)* "**And David sent,**" etc. "This unceremonious proceeding was quite in the style of Eastern monarchs, who no sooner take a fancy for a lady than they despatch a messenger to intimate their royal wishes that she should henceforth reside in the palace, and her duty is implicitly to obey. David's conduct shows that the manner of the Eastern nations were already imitated by the great men in Israel, and that the morality of the times, which God permitted, gave its sanction to the practice of polygamy. . . . The fact of a woman in her wealthy circumstances so willingly forming a matrimonial alliance with David, shows that the position he occupied, while expatriated in the wilderness, was far more elevated and comfortable than is generally imagined." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 43. "**David took,**" rather, *had taken*. "The expression also points to David's marriage with Michal, the daughter of Saul." *(Keil.)* "**Jezreel.**" Not Jezreel in the tribe of Issachar (Josh. xix. 18), but the one mentioned in Josh. xv. 56, not far from Maon.

Ver. 44. "**Phalti.**" Called Phaltiel in 2 Sam. iii. 15. But Michal returned to David after Saul's death. "**Gallim.**" A place between Gibeah of Saul and Jerusalem (Isa. x. 30).

Note.—Delany draws an analogy between the character and history of David at this time and the legend of Orpheus in Thrace. He says: "I beg only to premise and to submit to the reader's consideration whether, if he saw two historical pictures (the only two of the kind extant in the world), all whose outlines, parts, proportions, principal figures, actions, and attitudes, were exactly the same, but the colouring and other circumstantials different, and one of these confessedly ancient and a true original, and the other demonstrably later, but the date and the author uncertain—whether he would not conclude the later to be in truth no other than a copy of the original." He quotes ancient writers to prove that Orpheus was not a Thracian, and instances his traditional beauty, his skill in music and song, his success in softening the infernal king, etc., as so many points of agreement between the two. Referring Psalm cxx. to David's sojourn at this time in or near the country of the Edomites, he quotes the Arab tradition that stones and birds were obedient to him, though he could not reclaim the wild men of the desert (Psa. cxx.), and the legend concerning Orpheus, which pictures the rocks, beasts, and birds as obedient to him, although he could not civilise the Thracians. For the full argument in favour of this view see Delany's "Life of David."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse 1.

The Death of Samuel.

I. The death of the righteous often seems unseasonable in relation to the living. It is often so in family and social life. Children especially need a kind and strong hand to guide and train them, and when their father's or their mother's hand is such an one, their removal by death seems most inopportune and an unmitigated calamity. We think how much better it would have been for the family if the parent's life had been prolonged for a little season, until the children's characters were more established, and they were altogether more fitted to face the world alone. And the same thing often takes place in national life. A great and good man is removed when it seems as if the country in which he has been so great a power for good must suffer irreparable loss by his removal, and that the time of his departure is the time when the nation most needs him. Samuel's death at this time seemed a most unseasonable event so far as the welfare of Israel was concerned. Although he had retired from public life, he could hardly fail still to exert some power for good over Saul, and the universal lamentation at his death shows that the respect of the people was undiminished, and, therefore, his influence upon them was still great and salutary. Looking from a human stand-point, it seemed especially desirable that his life should be prolonged until David had succeeded to the throne, and peace and order had taken the place of the present misrule and anarchy.

II. But the value of the life of the righteous often becomes more manifest at his death, and so the lessons of his life more influential. The sun rises upon the earth morning by morning, and its coming is so regular and certain that men take its appearance and all the light and heat that it brings as a matter of course, and do not realise how many and how inestimable are the blessings that it bestows, or how indispensable it is to our well-being. But if there came a morning when the sun did not rise, and if it were known that it would shine upon the world no more, how the value of sunlight would come home to every man, and how universal would be the lamentation over its absence. So it is often with a good man's influence. It is so constant, so unobtrusive, and yet so fraught with blessing, that none realise what he is and what he does until he is gone, and then they know his value by his loss. But the awakening to a sense of his worth gives force to the lessons of his life—both to those of deed and word—and so he being dead still speaks, and often to more attentive and obedient ears than when living. This is doubtless the key to what often seems at first sight so mysterious and dark a providence, the death of the righteous when their life seems so much needed. It is quite possible it was so in Samuel's case. It is certain that the people who had disregarded his advice were the same who now lamented him, and it may be that their sense of loss brought home more powerfully to their hearts and consciences the truths which he had taught them in the days which were past.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The aged man is laid aside, and sinks out of the popular view; and when, at length, he dies, people are startled as they recall how great a man he was in his prime, how great a work he did. It is something to live so that one's death will be truly mourned by a whole people. The old, who sadly think themselves forgotten, may find solace, not only in reviewing the past, but also in the persuasion that yet once again they will be vividly remem-

bered, while the younger should strive to anticipate that coming time, and show respect and affection while it can be fully enjoyed.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

The General Effect of Samuel's Whole Career.

Observe what his position was, and how he filled it. He was not a founder of a new state of things, like Moses, nor a champion of the existing order, like Elijah or Jeremiah. He stood, literally, between the two—between the living and the dead, between the past and future, the old and the new, with that sympathy for each which, at such a period, is the best hope for any permanent solution of the questions which torment it. He had been brought up and nurtured in the old system. . . . His early dedication to the sanctuary belonged to that age of vows of which we saw the excess in the rash vows of Jephthah, of Saul, and the assembly at Mizpeh: in the more regular, but still peculiar and eccentric devotion of Samson to the life of a Nazarite. . . . He was also the last of the Judges, of that long succession who had been raised up from Othniel downwards to effect special deliverances. (1 Sam. vii. 12.) . . . But he must be regarded as the first representative of the new epoch which was dawning on the country. He is explicitly described as Samuel, *the Prophet.* (Acts iii. 24, xiii. 20.) . . . By the ancient name of seer—older than any other designation of the prophetic office—he was known in his own and after times, . . . and he is the beginning of that prophetical dispensation which ran parallel with the monarchy from the first to the last king. . . . And, unlike Moses or Deborah, or any previous saint or teacher of the Jewish Church, he grew up for this office from his earliest years. . . . His work and his life are the counterparts of each other, . . . and his mission is an example of the special mission which such characters are called upon to fulfil. In proportion as the different stages of life have sprung naturally and spontaneously out of each other, without any abrupt revulsion, each serves as a foundation upon which the other may stand—each makes the foundation of the other more sure and stable. In proportion as our own foundation is thus stable, and as our own minds and hearts have grown up thus gradually and firmly, without any violent disturbance or wrench to one side or to the other; in that proportion is it the more possible to view with calmness and moderation the difficulties and differences of others—to avail ourselves of the new methods and new characters that the advance of time throws in our way, . . . to preserve and to communicate the childlike faith—changed, doubtless, in form, but the same in spirit—in which we first knelt in humble prayer for ourselves and others, and drank in the first impressions of God and heaven. The call may come to us in many ways; it may tell us of the change of the priesthood, of the fall of the earthly sanctuary, of the rise of strange thoughts, of the beginning of a new epoch. Happy are they who are able to perceive the signs of the times, and to answer without fear or trembling, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."—*Dean Stanley.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 2—43.

Nabal, David, and Abigail.

In this narrative we have—

I. Selfishness refusing to acknowledge the rights of others. As in the human body no member or organ exists for itself but each for the good of the other and to contribute its part to the wellbeing of the whole, so in the Divine ideal of the human family each member is intended to live, not to

minister to his personal gratification, but to do his or her part in promoting the welfare of the entire race. And as the health and consequent comfort of each bodily member is the reward of this rightful discharge of relative functions, so every man and woman who recognises and strives to discharge his or her relative duties will reap the recompense in individual comfort and peace of soul. Differences and inequalities of gifts and varieties of providential dealings make such a mutual ministry absolutely necessary, and doubtless have this end in view among others, to bind men more closely to each other by compelling a mutual dependence and obligation. But Nabal here stands before us as the impersonation of that large majority of mankind who deny such obligations, and refuse to recognise their position as that of stewards of the gifts with which God has entrusted them. Nabal here looks upon his abundance as his own peculiar and rightful possession; "he says," remarks Wordsworth, "*my* bread, *my* meat, *my* water, *my* shearers, as if anything were really his own and not lent him by God;" and men generally forget that each human creature has some right to the produce of that earth which was given by God to the children of men (Psa. cxv. 16) for their sustenance and enjoyment. This churlish sheepmaster was really indebted to David and his men for services actually rendered; if they had not been "a wall" unto Nabal's men "night and day, while they were keeping the sheep," (ver. 16) he would have had a smaller flock to shear and perhaps the loss of useful servants to deplore, but he was not at a loss for an excuse for refusing to consider these services. He makes the very condition of need which strengthened David's claim an excuse for refusing to satisfy it, and insinuating that David's present untoward circumstances are the fruit of misconduct, disclaims all knowledge of him, and implies that this in itself is a sufficient reason for letting him and his followers suffer. These have always been favourite arguments in the mouth of selfishness against helping those in need. If a man is poor, it is convenient to assume that it is the consequence of crime, and even if that fact cannot be proved, ignorance of who he is or whence he came is held to be sufficient to absolve from all obligations in relation to him. But God will not admit such pleas. He has both in word and deed declared them null and void. In the laws given for the government of the Hebrew commonwealth, special arrangements were made to ensure to each and all a due proportion of material good. The enactments connected with the year of jubilee were doubtless intended to secure this end and to prevent families from sinking into a condition of permanent and hopeless poverty. And although misfortune and trials are inseparable from the conditions of the present life, and were the lot of some of God's chosen people as well as of others, he who had waxen poor was still to be regarded as a *brother* and treated as such (Lev. xxv. 25), and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow were to be provided for at the penalty of forfeiting the Divine blessing (Deut. xxiv. 19-21). In the instance before us, God, by a special visitation of judgment, made it manifest that His commands cannot be set at nought with impunity.

II. Righteous indignation at wrong degenerating into an unrighteous spirit of retaliation. It has been well said that there are no errors so mischievous as those which are the perversions of truth, and it is also true that no sinful emotions are so dangerous as those which have their origin in feelings which are natural and right. Affection, for instance, is a God-implanted instinct of the soul, but it may run into idolatry of the beloved object. And careful provision for one's own house is enjoined by Paul (1 Tim. v. 8), but it may degenerate into worldliness and covetousness, and it is often difficult for erring human creatures to hold the balance between the right and the wrong in these and other cases. David found it so at this time. Indignation at Nabal's injustice was lawful, but he did not stop there. No doubt the suddenness of the provocation

had something to do with his hasty and sinful resolve. The vessel that is struck in a sudden squall is in greater danger than one in which the captain has foreseen the storm and has therefore prepared for it. After all, Nabal had not wronged David so much as Saul had, and yet there is more of vindictive feeling in this utterance against the foolish sheepmaster than he ever manifested against his royal father-in-law. But then he knew what to expect from Saul, whereas he probably expected quite different treatment from Nabal. Apart from the fact that sheepshearing was the customary season of large and generous entertainment of all comers, it is plain that Nabal was indebted to David and his men, and it seems impossible, too, seeing that his wife was evidently well acquainted with David's history and character, that he could have been so ignorant of them as he pretended to be. Therefore David had good reason to look for a different reception of his message, and was fully justified in feeling himself wronged. But he was not justified in giving way to a spirit of revenge and still less in purposing to make many innocent people suffer for the guilt of one person. In this, as in other seasons of trial, the man after God's own heart shows himself to be of "*like passions as we are*" (James v. 17), and apt to allow lawful desire and virtuous emotion to drift into very positive and even great transgression.

III. Godly prudence averting the consequences of selfishness. Prudence has been defined as "right knowledge in special cases—the practical realisation of the higher principle of knowledge found in wisdom." When wisdom decrees that a certain thing is to be done, or a certain word spoken, prudence decides upon the best time and place and manner of doing the deed or speaking the word. If we apply this definition to Abigail's action at this time we shall find it is characterised by a rare prudence as to choice of *time* and *place*. Many a one can see what ought to have been done when the time is past for doing it. Many can act wisely and well after time for mature deliberation, but there are emergencies which admit of no delay for maturing plans. Abigail was in such an emergency now. There could be no delay if her household were to be saved from slaughter, and David from the commission of a great crime. She had to "make haste" in all her preparations, and to decide upon her line of argument with David while on her way to meet him, and she doubtless desired to encounter him on ground where he was in possession rather than on her own domain. She would thus come before him in the character of a suppliant, throwing herself more entirely on his generosity than if she had awaited his arrival nearer home, and it would be less humiliating to him and to his men to yield to her demands in such circumstances than if they had turned back when already at her gate. Many a good intention has failed of success, and many a wise word has fallen unheeded to the ground, because there has not been a due regard to the *place* as well as the time of executing the one or uttering the other. But Abigail did not err in this respect. Her prudence was most conspicuous, however, in the arguments she used to turn David from his purpose. There is no surer way of winning over an enemy than to recognise and acknowledge that he has good ground of displeasure. When he sees that we can to some extent excuse, and even justify him, he feels that he has a fair foe to deal with, and a great part of the gulf that separated us is bridged over at once. Abigail begins her address to David by freely admitting that he had been very badly treated by her husband, and that he had just cause of displeasure. This must have had a powerful influence upon him, and he must have quickly discerned that she was of a spirit quite different from that of her foolish husband. She then appeals to the deepest emotions and strongest motives of her adversary. She was happy in having to contend with a man who, although liable to err in word and action, was, like herself, a true servant of Jehovah, who would not deliberately be guilty of transgressing the Divine law. When a godly person has such a one to deal with, they know from their own experience what argu-

ments will be of most weight. They know that such a man or woman is in the habit of committing his or her cause to God, and that in their inmost soul they are assured that it is safe with Him. They know how bitter to such are the upbraidings of conscience after wrong done, and how one such act of a good man, although repented of and forgiven, will sometimes sadden all his future life. Abigail, by reminding David of all these things, recalled his better self, and enabled his reason and conscience and faith to re-assume their mastery over him. He would have been a hardened man who could have resisted such an appeal—with a man of David's devout spirit it was impossible. His words of gratitude to this good woman and to the God whose messenger she was, shows how complete was the conquest.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 3. Even the line of faithful Caleb will afford an ill-conditioned Nabal. Virtue is not, like unto lands, inheritable.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 11. Our Lord describing the *Nabal* (or *fool*) of the gospel; who had said "I have no room where to bestow *my* fruits; I will pull down *my* barns, etc., adds that God said unto him, "Thou *fool* (thou second *Nabal*), this night shall thy soul be required of thee, and then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided" (Luke xii. 17–20.—*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 12. Some understand this verse, that all the righteous are bound together as in a bundle, being of the same faith, religion, affection; whereas the wicked do fall off from one another, are never soundly conjoined and coupled together. 2. Some refer it unto the next life, that David should be bound up with the Lord among His saints. 3. Some, that he should have a sure house to him and his posterity, who should be as fast bound to continue as a bundle surely tied together. 4. But it is rather to be understood of David's preservation, even in this life, as the words show both going before and following; for before Abigail spake of Saul's rising against David, and after she saith that God shall cast out his enemies. . . . Yet the words have also a fit relation unto eternal life.—*Willet.*

Ver. 31. There was no need that Abigail should add to her words the prayer, "Remember thine handmaid." The impression which her address produced in the soul of David was powerful and decisive. Like one walking in a dream, who wakens up at the sound of his name, and suddenly, with horror, sees himself on the brink of a giddy precipice, and overflowing with thanks towards his deliverer, retraces his steps,—such was now the state of David's mind. Besides, he had learned to his humiliation, as well as also to his safety, to know one side of his temperament, which till now he had not been so clearly conscious of. As long as life lasts he will not forget this march towards Carmel. And we, perhaps, do not err if we suppose that what he once experienced at Carmel hovered before his soul, as often as in his psalms, particularly in the seventeenth, the eighteenth, the thirty-seventh, and the sixty-sixth, he raised his cry to the Lord as a God who "holdeth our soul in life, and *suffereth not our feet to be moved.*"—*Krummacher.*

Ver. 38. Let us note the suggestive contrast which is here presented in the deaths of Samuel and Nabal. On the one hand, we have a good man, taken to his reward after a long life spent in the service of his God, and a whole nation gathers to weep around his tomb. On the other, we have a surly, selfish, sottish man called to his account, and no tear is shed over his grave; but instead, a feeling of relief is experienced by all who were connected with him, for they are all conscious that they will

be the happier for his absence. In the one case, the life on earth was but the prelude to a higher, holier, and more useful existence in the heavenly world; in the other, the earthly character was but the germ out of which would spring, in the state beyond, a deeper, darker, and more repulsive wickedness even than that which he had manifested here. I do not think that David wrote the 37th Psalm at this particular date, since, from one expression which it contains, he seems to have penned that ode in his old age; but, whensoever it was written, it is hard for me to believe that he had not before his mind at the time the contrast between Nabal and Samuel which this history so vividly presents. What could be more appropriate to Nabal than these words: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." And surely David thought of Samuel when he wrote this verse: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

Now, the practical question for us is, To which of these two classes do we belong? Alas, there are many in these days whose lives are inflicting a constant martyrdom on all who have the misfortune to be nearly related to them, and whose deaths, while full of sadness to themselves, would yet be a blessing and a relief to their friends as ridding them of a constant and fearful misery. "A living cross is heavier than a dead one;" and there are few who have to carry a weightier or sharper cross than the wives and families of these Nabals, whose intemperance has brutified them into harsh, unfeeling cruelty.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Ver. 32. A good heart is easily stayed from sinning, and is glad when it finds occasion to be crossed in ill purposes. Those secret checks, which are raised within itself, do readily conspire with all outward retentives: it never yielded to a wicked motion without much reluctation; and when it is overcome it is but with half a consent: whereas perverse and obdurate sinners, by reason they take full delight in evil, and have already in their conceit swallowed the pleasure of sin, abide not to be resisted, running on headily in those wicked courses they have propounded, in spite of opposition; and, if they be forcibly stopped in their way, they grow sullen and mutinous. David had not only vowed, but deeply sworn, the death of Nabal, and all his family, to the very dog that lay at his door; yet now he praiseth God, that hath given the occasion and grace to violate it. Wicked vows are ill made, but worse kept. Our tongue cannot tie us to commit sin. Good men think themselves happy, that since they had not the grace to deny sin, yet they had not the opportunity to accomplish it.—*Bp. Hall.*

Observe the contrast between David and Herod. David is deterred by the expostulations of Abigail, a prudent and fair woman, from keeping his oath and putting to death an evil man, Nabal, and he blesses God for it, Herod is urged by Herodias and her mother, two fair women in countenance but foul in heart, to keep his rash oath, and to put to death a holy man, John the Baptist; and he suffered remorse for doing so, and afterwards fell into a greater sin, and mocked the *Divine David* (Luke xxiii. 11), and came to a miserable end.—*Wordsworth.*

Verses 2–40. The history of David's collision with Nabal—not a very flattering chapter in the history of his life—is inserted between the history of his two great victories over the spirit of revenge and impatience; and by the guidance of the Divine Spirit the historian seems so to have arranged the narrative, for the purpose of showing us how the servant of God may conquer in a great fight and yet be overcome in a small. The history of all warfare is full of such cases. In the presence of a great enemy the utmost vigilance is maintained; every effort is strained, every stimulus is applied. In the presence of a small foe the spirit of

confidence and security leaves every position unguarded, and often paves the way for signal defeat. In the spiritual warfare nothing can be more common.—*Blaikie.*

Verses 32, 33. *Prevention of sin is one of the greatest mercies that God can vouchsafe a man in this world.* 1. From the deplorable condition of the sinner, before that mercy prevents him. He is in the direct way of death and destruction, and wholly unable to help himself. . . . A man under the drift of any passion will still follow the impulse of it until something interpose, and by a stronger impulse turn him another way; but in this case we can find no principle within him strong enough . . . for if it be any, it must be either (1) the judgment of his reason, or (2) the free choice of his will, and while a man is engaged in any sinful purpose, through the prevalence of passion, he fully approves of whatsoever he is carried on to do in the full strength of it. While David's heart was full of his revengeful design, it had blinded and perverted his reason so far that it told him that the bloody purpose he was going to execute was just and becoming. . . . 2. It is perfectly free grace . . . for if things concur, and providence cuts not off the opportunity, the act of sin must needs follow. . . . Because every commission of sin introduces into the soul a certain degree of hardness, and an aptness to continue in it. It is much more difficult to throw out than not to let in. . . . Sin taken into the soul is like liquor poured into a vessel; so much of it as it fills, it also seasons. The touch and tincture go together. So that although the body of the liquor should be poured out again, yet still it leaves that tang behind it which makes the vessel fitter for that, than for any other. . . . And every commission imprints upon the soul a further proneness to sin as drinking both quenches the present thirst and provokes it for the future. 3. The only thing that can entitle to pardon—repentance—is not in the sinner's power . . . for this is the sinner's hard lot, that the same thing that makes him need repentance makes him also in danger of not obtaining it. 4. The greatness of this preventing mercy is eminently proved from those advantages accruing to the soul from the prevention of sin above what can be had from the bare pardon of it. First: Of the clearing of a man's condition; and secondly: Of the satisfaction of his mind. . . . So much of prevention, so much of innocence. . . . Sometimes God may suffer the soul but just to begin the sinful production by reflecting upon a sin suggested with some complacency; which is to *conceive sin*, and then He may extinguish it. . . . Or He may permit it to pass into purpose and then make it prove abortive by stifling it. . . . Or He may let it come even *to the birth*, by strong endeavour to commit it, and yet then deny it *strength to bring forth.* Or God may suffer it to be born, and pass from endeavour into commission; and this is the last step but one, and that is, the frequent repetition which settles into a habit of sin. . . . But wherever God may turn the fatal stream it is a vast mercy. . . . Now, when grace keeps a man from sin he certainly knows that it is so . . . but grace may seal the sinner's pardon and yet have left no transcript of that pardon in his breast. The handwriting may be cancelled in the court of heaven, and yet the indictment run on in the court of conscience . . . so that though the pardoned and the innocent may be equally safe, they cannot, without rare privilege, be equally cheerful. . . . . Here is an unfailing criterion by which every man may discover the disposition of his own heart. . . . David overlooks the rich and seasonable present of Abigail, though pressed with hunger and travel; but her advice, which disarmed his rage and calmed his revenge, draws forth his high gratulations.—*South.*

This is one of the earliest cases recorded in the Bible in which the interests of the employer and the em-

ployed—the man of wealth and the man of work—stood, or seemed to stand, in antagonism to each other. It was a period in which an old system of things was breaking up; and the new one was not yet established, but a kind of right had grown up, irregular enough, but sufficient to establish a claim on Nabal for remuneration—a new claim, not admitted by him, reckoned by him an exaction, which could be enforced by no law, only by that law which is above all statute law, deciding according to emergencies, an undefinable instinctive sense of fairness and justice. In modern language the rights of labour were in conflict with the rights of property. Observe the fearful hopeless character of the struggle. The question had come to this: Whether David, with his ferocious six hundred mountaineers, united by the sense of wrong, or Nabal with his well fed and trained hirelings, bound by interest, not love, to his cause, were stronger? Which was the more powerful, want whetted by insult, or selfishness pampered by indulgence: they who wished to keep by force or they who wished to take? An awful and uncertain spectacle, but the spectacle which is exhibited in every country where rights are keenly felt and duties lightly.

I. **The causes of this false social state.** 1. False basis upon which social superiority was supposed to rest. Throughout Nabal's conduct was built upon an assumption of his own superiority. He was a man of wealth. David was dependent upon his own daily efforts. Was not this enough to settle the question of inferiority and superiority? The evils of poverty are comparative—they depend on climate—they depend on contrast. Where all suffer equally, men bear hardship with cheerfulness; but where the luxury of enjoyment is out of all proportion monopolised by the few, when wealth or rank assumes an insulting domineering character, then the falsehood of superiority can be tolerated no longer. It was this which here brought matters to a crisis. 2. A false conception concerning rights. It would be unjust to Nabal to represent this as an act of wilful oppression. David's demand appeared an invasion of his rights—a dictation with respect to that which was his own. There was something to be said for him. It was the view of his class, had descended to him from his parents, and it is hard to see through the falsehood of any system by which we profit and which is upheld by general consent, especially when good men, too, uphold it. On the other hand, David and his men were not slow to perceive that they had their rights over that property of Nabal's. The harvest was in part David's harvest, for without David it never could have been reaped. The sheep were in part David's sheep, for without David not a sheep would have been spared by the marauders of the hill. The right which the soldier has by law to his pay was the right which David had by unwritten law, a right resting on the fact that his services were indispensable. Now when it comes to this, rights against rights, there is no determination of the question but by overwhelming numbers, or blood, and it is difficult to say to which side in such a quarrel we should wish well. If the rich man succeeds he will bind the chain more severely and surely upon the crushed serf, and the victory of the lawless with the memory of past wrongs to avenge is almost more sanguinary than the victory of those who have had power long and whose power has been defied.

II. **The message of the Church to the man of wealth.** It contains those principles which, carried out, realise the Divine Order of Society—not creating the facts of our humanity—simply making them known. And because these principles are externally true we find in Abigail's conduct towards David the very principles which the Church of Christ has given to the world. 1. The spiritual dignity of man as man. David was the poor man, but the high-born lady admits his worth. Here is a truth revealed. Worth does not mean what a man is worth—you must find some better definition. This is the very truth revealed in the Incarnation.

Christ, the King of humanity, is the poor woman's son. 2. The law of sacrifice. Abigail did not heal the grievance with smooth words. You might have said half of her provision would have been enough. But liberality is a most real economy. We wrong Abigail, however, if we call this economy or calculation; it would have failed on this principle. Ten times this sum from Nabal would not have arrested the revenge, but David felt that these were not the gifts of a sordid calculation, but of a generous heart. This is the attractive power of that great law whose highest expression is the cross. 3. The matter of rightful influence. Very remarkable is David's demeanour towards Nabal as contrasted with his demeanour towards Abigail. It was not, therefore, against the wealthy class, but against individuals of the class, that the wrath of these men burned. There is reverence for superiors, if only it can be shown that they are superiors. It is deeply rooted in the heart of humanity—you cannot tear it out. Civilisation, science, progress, only change its direction: they do not weaken its force. Emancipation from false lords only sets the heart free to honour true ones. The free-born David will not do honour to Nabal. But behold, he has found a something nobler than himself, and in gratitude and profound respect he bows to that. To conclude. Doubtless David was wrong, and yet for one text in the Bible which requires submission and patience from the poor, you will find a hundred which denounce the vices of the rich, and woe to us if we have forgotten that David's, not Nabal's, is the cause of God.—*Abridged from F. W. Robertson's Sermons, Vol. I.*

Ver. 40–44. Abigail's meeting with David under the covert of the hill; . . . and David's chivalrous answer to her chivalrous appeal—all the scene, which painters have so often delighted to draw, is a forefeeling, a prophecy, as it were, of the Christian chivalry of after ages. The scene is most human and most divine; and we are not shocked to hear that after Nabal's death the fair and rich lady joins her fortune to that of the wild outlaw, and becomes his wife, to wander by wood and wold. But, amid all the simple and sacred beauty of that scene, we cannot forget, we must not forget, that Abigail is but one wife of many, that there is an element of pure, single, all-absorbing love absent, at least in David's heart, which was present in the hearts of our forefathers in many a like case, and which they have handed down to us as a heirloom, as precious as that of our laws and liberties. And all this was sin unto David, and, like all sin, brought with it its own punishment. I do not mean to assign his exact amount of moral responsibility. Our Lord forbids us to do that, and least of all, to a man who only acted according to his light, and the fashion of his race and age. But we must fix it very clearly in our minds, that sins may be punished in this life, even though he who commits them is not aware that they are sins. If you are ignorant that fire burns, your ignorance will not prevent your hand from suffering if you put it into the fire. . . Sin, ἁμάρτια, means first, it seems to me, a missing of the mark, end, or aim of our existence; a falling short of the law, the ideal, the good works which God has prepared beforehand for us to walk in, and every such sin, conscious or unconscious, must avenge itself by the Divine laws of the universe. . . . No miracle is needed. . . . God's laws are far too well made for Him to need to break them a second time because a sinner has broken them already. They avenge themselves. And so does polygamy. It did in the case of David. Look at what he might have been . . . living together with a helpmate worthy of him in godly love to his life's end . . . and what was the fact? The indulgence of his passions—seemingly harmless at first—becomes most harmful and he commits a complication of crimes.—*Kingsley.*

CHAPTER XXVI.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—The fact that the incidents related in this chapter agree in some points with those narrated in chapters xxiii. xxiv. has led Ewald, Thenius, and others to conclude that the historian has given two accounts of the same event. But a writer who could thus repeat himself in the general, while professing to give an account of events in their proper order, and at the same time could vary so much in detail, would be quite unworthy of confidence. And, as Keil shows, the details, after all, differ greatly. "When David was betrayed the first time, he drew back into the desert of Maon before the advance of Saul, and, being completely surrounded upon one of the mountains there, was only saved from being taken prisoner by the advance of the Philistines. (Chap. xxiii. 25-28.) But on the second occasion Saul encamped upon the hill of Hachilah, whilst David had secretly drawn back into the adjoining desert, from which he crept secretly into Saul's encampment. . . . On the first occasion Saul entered a cave in the desert of Engedi, whilst David and his men were concealed in the interior. . . . The second time David went with Abishai into the encampment of Saul, upon the hill of Hachilah. . . . It is true that on both occasions David's men told him that God had given his enemy into his hand; but the first time they added, 'Do to him what seemeth good in thy sight;' and David cut off the lappel of Saul's coat, whereupon his conscience smote him. . . . In the second instance, on the contrary, David called two of his heroes to go with him into the camp of his sleeping foe, and then went thither with Abishai, who thereupon said, 'God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand; let me alone, that I may pierce him with the spear.' But David rejected this proposal, and merely took away the spear and water-bowl that were at Saul's head. And, notwithstanding that the words of David and the replies of Saul agree in certain general thoughts, yet they differ entirely in the main. On the first occasion David showed the king that his life had been in his power, and yet he had spared him, to dispel the illusion that he was seeking his life. On the second he asked the king why he was pursuing him, and called upon him to desist. But Saul was so affected the first time that he wept aloud, and openly declared that David would obtain the kingdom, and asked him to promise on oath that when he did he would not destroy his family. The second time he only declared that he had sinned and acted foolishly, and would do David no more harm, and that David would undertake and prevail, but he neither shed tears, nor brought himself to speak of David's ascending the throne, so that he was evidently much more hardened than before." As to the moral unlikelihood that Saul would have made a second attempt upon David's life after being treated so generously by him, such conduct on his part seems quite in keeping with his vacillating character on other occasions. On this subject Nägelsbach remarks, "That Saul marched against David a second time is easily explained, even although he was no moral monster (as Thenius affirms he must have been in such a case). His hatred to David was so deeply rooted that it could be only temporarily suppressed by that magnanimous deed, not extinguished." It is indeed plain, from David's conduct after the first remonstrance with Saul, that he placed little or no reliance upon his professions of repentance.

Ver. 1. "**Hill of Hachilah.**" See on chap. xxiii. 19. Jamieson suggests that one reason for David's returning to this locality might have been to be near Abigail's possessions. "**Before Jeshimon.**" Jeshimon literally signifies "the waste or wilderness;" *before* should be "in the face of," or "south of."

Ver. 2. "**Three thousand chosen men.**" "The permanent guard whose formation is mentioned in chap. xiii. 2." (*Erdmann.*) "**Went down.**" "Though Gibeah, as its name imports, stood on an elevated position, and the desert of Ziph may have been higher than Gibeah, it was still necessary to descend in leaving the latter place; hence Saul 'went down' into the wilderness of Ziph." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 3. "**David abode in the wilderness.**" "That is, he had withdrawn from the hill Hachilah (where the Ziphites reported him as being, and Saul sought first to attack him) farther into the wilderness, and was then on the highland (compare ver. 6, 'who will go down with me?'), while Saul was encamped on the road to the plain" (ver. 3, "by the way.") (*Erdmann.*) "**He saw.**" Rather, he *learned*, or *perceived by the report* of his spies.

Ver. 5. "**Abner.**" "The Hebrew *Ab* signifies *father;* but the captain of Saul's host may have been so called in honour of some ancestor, without any reference to the meaning of the word. Another explanation has been suggested. 'In Abner there are two pure Gomeric roots, and *ab* is the contrary of father, for it is expressly stated—*Abner*, **son** *of Ner*, etc. The *ab* is of course the *ab* or *ap* of the *Appii* of Italy and of the Cymry of Britain—son; Abner, son of strength; or in Latin, Appius Nero; and as we know that the Appii Claudii Nerones were a pure Umbrian family, we have in the centre of Palestine, B.C. 1000, and in the centre of Italy, B.C. at least 700, two Gomeric families of precisely the same name derived from their common family language (Japhetic) in the most natural way conceivable. It is utterly impossible that the Jewish writer, whoever he was, could

have devised such a coincidence, or imagined its ethnological significance. He wrote down the simple fact. We know how to explain it, but this very knowledge is a confirmation of the prophetic utterance of Noah.'" (Gen. ix. 27.) ("Vindication of the Mosaic Ethnology of Europe.") (*Jamieson.*) "**Trench.**" Literally "the place of wagons." (See on chap. xvii. 20.)

Ver. 6. "**Ahimelech the Hittite.**" This man is only mentioned here. "The Hittites, a Canaanitish people, already settled around Hebron in Abraham's time (Gen. xv. 23), dwelt, after the return of the Israelites from Egypt, in the hill country of Judah with the Amorites, reaching as far north as towards Bethel (Judges ii. 26), subdued but not exterminated by the Israelites. A portion of them had maintained a certain independence" (1 Kings ix. 20, x. 29; 2 Kings vii. 6). (*Erdmann.*) Uriah was also a Hittite. "**Abishai.**" The nephew of David (see 1 Chron. ii. 16), and afterwards one of his famous generals (2 Sam. xviii. 2, etc.)

Ver. 8. "**I will not smite him a second time.**" Abishai could have easily pinned David to the ground with one thrust of his sword, and no second blow would have been needed.

Ver. 10. "**The Lord shall smite him,**" etc. Rather, *unless* **the Lord shall smite,** etc. So Keil, Thenius, and others.

Ver. 11. "**The spear that is at his bolster and the cruse of water.**" "I noticed at all the encampments which we passed that the sheik's tent was distinguished from the rest by a tall spear stuck upright in the front of it; and it is the custom, when a party is out on an excursion for robbery or for war, that when they halt to rest, the spot where the chief reclines or rests is thus designated. The whole of the scene in 1 Sam. xxvi. 7, is perfectly natural, even to the deep sleep into which all had fallen, so that David and Abishai could walk among them in safety. The Arabs sleep heavily, especially when fatigued. Often, when travelling, my muleteers and servants have agreed to watch together in places thought to be dangerous; but in every instance I soon found them to be fast asleep, and generally their slumbers were so profound that I could not only walk among them without their waking, but might have taken the very *aba* with which they were covered. Then the cruse of water at Saul's head is in exact accordance with the customs of the people at this day. No one ventures to travel over these deserts without their cruse of water, and it is very common to place it at the bolster, so that the owner can reach it during the night. The Arabs eat their dinner in the evening, and it is generally of such a nature as to create thirst; and the quantity of water which they drink is enormous. (*Thomson's Land and the Book.*)

Verses 13, 14. "**And David stood,**" etc. The purity of the air of Palestine would render this quite easy. Dr. Thomson says, "There are thousands of ravines where the whole scene could be enacted, every word be heard, and yet the speaker be quite beyond the reach of his enemies." "David had, no doubt, reconnoitered the camp from the opposite hill, and then *gone down to it* (ver. 6), and returned after the deed was accomplished. The statement that this mountain was afar off, so that there was a great space between David and Saul, not only favours the accuracy of the historical tradition, but shows that David reckoned far less now upon any change in the state of Saul's mind than he had done before when he followed Saul from the cave without hesitation, and called after him; and that in fact he rather feared that Saul should endeavour to get him into his power as soon as he woke from his sleep." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 15. "**Art thou not a man?**" *i.e.*, a warrior. "This incidental reference to Abner's eminence as a warrior is borne out by his whole history. At the same time, David's bantering tone, coupled with verse 19, makes it probable that he considered Abner his enemy; the latter's great influence with Saul might have prevented the persecution of David. Abner may have feared David as a rival; his opposition to him is shown after Saul's death." (*Biblical Commentary.*) "**For there came one of the people,**" etc. "These reproaches cast at Abner were intended to show to Saul, who might, at anyrate, possibly hear, and who, in fact, did hear, that David was a more faithful defender of his life than his closest and most zealous servants." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 16. "**Worthy to die.**" Literally, *sons of death.*

Ver. 19. "**If the Lord have stirred thee up,**" etc. "David's word is based on the conception that God sometimes *incites men to evil.* (Comp. 2 Sam. xvi. 10 and 2 Sam. xxiv. 1.) The idea that evil is, from one point of view, to be referred to God as its cause, is not a product of later times, but is early found in connection with the idea of the Divine ordering of the world, in which evil must serve God in order to bring about His saving help (Gen. i. 20, comp. with xiv. 7, 8), and reveal His judicial glory (Exod. ix. 16). David therefore supposed the case that Saul's hatred towards him rests on the Divine causality (comp. ch. xviii. 10, xix. 9), where the evil spirit from the Lord which has come upon Saul is said to be the cause of his hate to David. The Divine incitement to evil consists, according to David's view, in the fact that Saul, sunk deep in sin by his own fault, is further given over by God to evil in that opportunity is given him to develop in deeds the evil of his heart." (*Erdmann.*) Keil's remarks on this phrase are sub-

stantially the same, and he adds, "The instigation of a sinner to evil is simply one peculiar way in which God, as a general rule, punishes sin through sinners; for God only instigates to evil actions, such as have drawn down the wrath of God upon them in consequence of their sins. When David supposes the fact that Jehovah has instigated Saul against him, he acknowledges, implicity at least, that he himself is a sinner, whom the Lord may be intending to punish, though without lessening Saul's wrong by this indirect confession." "**Let him accept an offering.**" Literally, let him *smell an offering.* (cf. Gen. viii. 21). "The meaning is, let Saul appease the wrath of God by the presentation of acceptable sacrifices. What sacrifices they are that please God is shown in Psa. li. 18, 19, and it is certainly not by accident merely that David uses the word *minchah*, the technical expression in the law for the bloodless sacrifice, which sets forth the sanctification of life in good works." *(Keil.)* "The sense is: pray to God that He take the temptation from thee." *(Bunsen.)* "**Cursed be they,**" etc. "David does not utter a wish, but states a fact, he does not pray that they may be cursed, but he asserts that they are incurring a curse from God." *(Wordsworth.)* "**Saying, go, serve other gods.**" "The idea implied is, that Jehovah could only be worshipped in Canaan, at the sanctuary consecrated to Him, because it was only there that He manifested Himself to His people." (*Keil.*) "We are not to understand that David's enemies were accustomed to use these words, but David was thinking of deeds rather than words." (*Calvin.*)

Ver. 20. "**As when one doth hunt a partridge.**" "Me, isolated from God's people, far from all association, a fugitive by thy machinations on the mountain heights, thou seekest at all costs to destroy, as one hunts a single fugitive partridge on the mountains only to kill it at all costs, while otherwise from its insignificance it would not be hunted since partridges are found in the fields in flocks." *(Erdmann.)* People in the east, in hunting the partridge and other game birds, pursue them till observing them becoming languid and fatigued, after they have been put up two or three times, they rush upon the birds stealthily and knock them down with bludgeons. (*Shaw's Travels.*) It was exactly in this manner that Saul was persecuting David; he drove him from time to time from his hiding-place, hoping to render him weary of his life or obtain an opportunity of accomplishing his destruction. (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 23. "**To every man.**" Keil and Erdmann translate *to the man—i.e.*, to David himself. "These words are not a sounding of his own praises, but merely the testimony of a good conscience in the presence of an enemy." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 24. "**Let my life.**" Keil and Erdmann read "so will my life."

Ver. 25. "**Thou wilt both undertake,**" etc. Here Saul does not express a changed *disposition*, love instead of the old enmity, but the fleeting better feeling which David's conduct had induced, and which compelled him to affirm that David would come forth victorious through the Lord's help out of all the straits of his persecution. The content and character of Saul's words in chap. xxiv. 16-22, are very different." (*Erdmann.*) "**David went his way,**" attaching no worth to Saul's acknowledgment of wrong. "**Saul returned to his place.**" Some expositors make a contrast between this expression and that in chap. xxiv. 22, in which Saul is said to have *gone home* after his interview with David, and understand that this time he did not desist even for a season from his pursuit.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

David's Visit to Saul's Camp.

I. There is a tendency in good to repeat itself in the soul of a good man. Good deeds are not a sure indication of a good character, for a wicked man may perform such from motives which are not good. Nor does one good deed, even if done from a worthy motive, make a good character. But one such action performed from a desire to do right in the sight of God lays the foundation for another and another, and such a repetition establishes that right habit of thinking and feeling and doing which constitute a godlike and holy character. And it is a strengthening reflection for all who are engaged in the struggle against the evil within them that every temptation met and conquered makes the next victory more easy, and every godlike and divine impulse obeyed gives an increase to the power and dominion of good in the soul. David's conduct here is a witness of this tendency of good to repeat itself. Since Saul was last in his power, every day had increased the provocation which he had suffered at the hand of his

persecutor, who had now added to his other crimes that of pursuing the man who had so lately spared his life. If David's former act of forbearance had not been dictated by right principle—if his entire attitude to Saul from the beginning of his persecution had not been the outcome of a spirit under the influence of the Spirit of God, he would have broken down under the long continuance of the demand upon his forbearance, and this last proof of Saul's ingratitude and inextinguishable enmity would have been too much for him to forgive, but as David was a godly man, it was as easy for him to spare Saul's life in the camp as it had been in the cave, and possibly this time the temptation was more easily overcome than on the former occasion.

II. There is a tendency in evil to repeat itself in the soul of a wicked man. If the good within becomes stronger by repetition, it is no less certain that the strength of sin increases in proportion as it is indulged in, and a sinful tendency or habit which once only bound a man as by a silken thread may come to fetter him as with an iron chain. The first few snowflakes that fall upon the earth are not noticed much, and can be easily swept away, even by a child, but continuing to fall hour after hour they will form a barrier which it may be well-nigh impossible to penetrate. So the first seeds of any sinful passion may enter into a human soul without producing any marked effect upon the life, and almost without the consciousness of the soul itself; but one sinful thought or feeling, if unchecked and harboured, will be quickly followed by another and another of the same character, until the man in whose spirit they have found a resting place becomes, before he is aware, a moral slave. Saul appears to afford a melancholy instance of such a process. Permitting jealous feelings towards David to find a lodging in his spirit, and listening to the evil suggestions of the worst part of his nature within and of the devil without, he came to be that slave of a sinful passion which he here appears. We cannot suppose, when he gave a place to the first emotions of envy of David, that he had any idea of the crimes to which they would one day lead him. But they had been permitted to remain undisturbed, and had so grown and strengthened by indulgence that all noble emotions had been buried alive beneath them and their victim stands before us in this picture not altogether unconscious of his degrading bondage, and yet making no effort to free himself. For although he here confesses his moral foolishness, and we read of no more active measures against David, his after history gives no reason to suppose that any radical change took place in his feelings towards him. If he had followed up his former conviction and confession of sin by struggle against it he would have found repentance then less difficult than now, and would not have added this darkest blot to the character he had already dimmed by many transgressions.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 12. Behold now, once more, our David, as he goes away with Saul's spear, the emblem of his sovereign power. At that moment he presents a symbolically significant appearance. Unconsciously he prophesied of his own future, while he stands before us as the projected shadow of that form in which we must one day behold him. In the counsel of the Invisible Watcher, it was, indeed, irrevocably concluded that the Bethlehemite should inherit Saul's sceptre, and here we see before us a dim pre-intimation of that fact.—*Krummacher.*

Ver. 19. It was part of Saul's punishment that he was constrained to persecute David, and in so doing he suffered more than David—consuming hatred, fear, the perpetual consciousness of the fruitlessness of all his measures—all this was perfect torture to him. Doubtless he would willingly have been freed from it, but there was

only one way in which he could obtain this freedom, viz., by true repentance; and this way he refused to take. *Because he would not desist from sin in general, he could not become free from this special form of sin.* This was his fate. David's piety is seen in the fact that he characterises it as the greatest sorrow inflicted on him by his enemies that they obliged him to leave the land of the Lord and go out into the heathen world, depriving him of the blessedness of religious communion.—*Hengstenberg.*

Verse 21. How wonderful is the effect of a single flash of lightning, when previously the heavens had been veiled in deepest gloom, and the darksome night had thrown over all nature its dreariest mantle. How completely, for a moment, it lifts that mantle. . . . Houses, trees, streets—they burst upon you; you seem never to have seen them so distinctly before. . . . And yet it is but for a moment; while you look the flash is gone. . . . It lasted long enough to make you feel its effect and then departed. . . . "I have played the fool and erred exceedingly;" tells of such a sudden gleam. To our view, it lays open in a moment the whole features of Saul's history, as he saw them himself. . . . Nothing escapes him; each avenue opens up its concealment, each pathway reveals the footsteps imprinted upon it . . and then the gloom returned. . . . It was not the dawn of true repentance, gradually unfolding reason for encouragement, and losing itself in brighter hopes and lasting joy, but it was the sudden flash which conscience, excited, will send through a soul, preliminary only to a deeper despair—to hopeless ruin. . . . I. *Saul's history justifies this expression inasmuch as his public life was marked by a continued attempt at thorough independence of God.* . . . This was folly—*first*, because it was subversive of all that reason and wisdom suggested. For the very being of a God is of itself sufficiently indicative of the place which the creatures of that God should occupy. . . . The laws of nature, in regard to matter, allow no interference with them which would subvert the relative conditions of strength and weakness, independence and dependence, without such results as would expose the folly of the attempt. . . . And on the same principle must there be read out the condemnation of downright folly when man so acts as to take upon himself the right to dictate for his own guidance. . . . What is this but an attempt to subvert what is fixed irrevocably? . . . Besides, *secondly*, it is not less against our own interests to put our own will in the place of God's. . . . Did Saul get on as well without God as with Him? And did ever the history of a single individual justify the supposition that this was possible? . . . II. *There was one particular course of action which was at this moment more especially present to Saul's view.* . . . In many respects he had erred; in one respect most especially so. . . . 1. His folly and error consisted in treating a man as his enemy who was, in reality, his best friend. . . How often is this mistake committed. How often do we see men making the least welcome those who have the highest title to their confidence, because they would do them real good; and treating as most welcome those whose influence on them is plainly prejudicial. The man who would not allow David in his sight, promoted Doeg the Edomite. . . . 2. Saul's folly also consisted in attempting by this conduct towards David to fly in the face of those Divine arrangements to which, however humiliating in their character, he was bound in meekness to submit. . . . Never does a man commit himself to a harder, and at the same time more fruitless, enterprise than when he fights against God's providential arrangements—when, for instance, God is evidently calling on him to give up some scheme for his own exaltation or his family's aggrandisement, and requiring him to take a humbler level, and he will grasp tightly and hold tenaciously the position which everything combines to tell him is for another. Nothing too, is a greater

temptation to a man to do unprincipled things than such an attempt. . . . But it is a fruitless work, however long maintained.—*Miller.*

Ver. 25. Saul is here also "among the prophets," and foretells David's exaltation and victory, "Vicisti; Nazarene!" was the exclamation of Julian. —*Wordsworth.*

Before we pass away from Saul's persecution of David, an interesting inquiry presents itself, which may be answered by the help of one of the Psalms. How came it, one is tempted to ask, that Saul was thus at one time so friendly to David, and at another filled with such bitter enmity against him? Much of this was owing, doubtless, to the impulsive, wayward, and capricious disposition which, as we have seen, grew upon him after his rejection by Samuel.

But this will not explain it all. An impulse will go on in a man until it exhausts itself; but it will then leave him, at least, indifferent, and something else will be required to account for the rapid reversal of his feelings, when we see him change in a short time from grateful appreciation to fierce antagonism. Where, then, shall we find that something in the case of Saul? The answer seems to me to be furnished by the inscription to the 7th Psalm, which, from its similarity to David's utterances to Saul on the occasions which have been before us, has been by most expositors connected with these events. It is entitled "Shiggaion of David, which he sang unto the Lord, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite." That is "a dithyrambic ode of David concerning the words of Cush." Now if we adopt the conjecture that Cush was one of Saul's confidential adherents, and that he had set himself deliberately and malignantly to poison his master's mind in reference to David, by inventing all manner of false assertions, and indulging in every variety of significant innuendoes concerning him, we have an explanation at once, of many statements in the narrative, of the vacillations in the disposition of Saul, and of the character of the Psalm to which the title belongs. . . . . When the king was alone, away from the influence of this black-hearted sycophant, David's noble and frank ingenuousness produced its appropriate impression on his heart; but when David disappeared, and this Cush resumed his insinuating supremacy, then Saul's heart was again estranged, and he vowed vengeance on the son of Jesse. Of course, if Saul had not been weak, this effect would not have been produced upon him; but, in the circumstances, we can see how the larger measure of the guilt belonged to Cush, and can understand why, while David spared the king, his heart was full of abhorrence of the part which was played by the false-hearted Benjamite.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

A few words may suitably be added in connection with these signal victories of David over the spirit of revenge, respecting what have been called his vindictive or imprecatory Psalms. . . . When loud complaints are made of the vindictive character of some of the Psalms of David, and when all the more favourable explanations of some of these Psalms are rejected with contempt, objectors may be fairly challenged to show how they can reconcile the view taken by them of these Psalms with the elevated generosity and forbearance that were so conspicuous in David's general character. Saul was not the only enemy of David's, or of God's, that experienced his forbearance. Absalom, Shemei, and other bitter opponents of himself and of the cause of truth, shared the same generous treatment. It may surely be held as established that, so far as David was concerned, no feeling of *personal* revenge could have led him to use the language or breathe the spirit of the imprecatory Psalms. It can easily be proved that many, where individuals seem at first to be the objects of denunciation, in point of fact either do not contemplate the case of individuals at all, or make use of them chiefly as signs or types of principles. . . . The fifth Psalm, for example,

appears to be a denunciation of the Psalmist's personal enemies. But in Rom. iii. 13 the words are quoted as part of a proof of the universal corruption of mankind. The proof would be palpably irrelevant if the language of the Psalmist applied only to his personal and public enemies. But it is not irrelevant if these enemies were viewed as *types or signs of those principles and habits of sin which infest the world.* . . . Still, we freely admit that among the imprecatory Psalms there are several where living persons are the objects of the most earnest imprecations. What is to be said of these? The least strained seems also the best explanation of them. They are the expression of holy indignation at those wicked men who were opposing every good work, and encouraging, for their own vile ends, all that was wicked and destructive; they convey the earnest desire which every good man must have, that such persons may be arrested, overthrown, and punished, in their impious and pernicious career. In some cases, the mode of punishment is that of the well-known *lex-talionis.* . . . Our ears tingle at the mention of them; we can hardly read the 137th Psalm without a shudder, but *the sense* of *the perfect justice* of the law was so deeply impressed on the minds of pious Jews, that no such feeling of horror appears to have been awakened in them. The *judicial* aspect prevailed over the personal.—*Blaikie.*

Note.—It was during this sojourn of David in the wilderness that the Gadites, mentioned in 1 Chron. xii. 8–14, enlisted themselves in his service, and probably in the interval between the event recorded in this chapter and that which opens the next, that there came to him some belonging to his own tribe of Judah, and also some of the tribe of Benjamin to which Saul belonged (1 Chron. xii. 16–18). These occurrences show that Saul was gradually losing his hold upon the people, and that their confidence in David was increasing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Saul shall despair,**" or "*desist from me.*" "The idea of the word is, to give a thing up as impossible or useless." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 2. "**Achish, son of Maoch.**" The particular description of the family of Achish have led some to suppose that he is not the person mentioned in chap. xxi. 10, but that Achish was a common name for the Philistine kings. If he is identical with the monarch mentioned in 1 Kings ii. 39 as the son of Maachah, he must have reigned more than fifty years, which, of course, is not impossible. "Gath had been before conquered by the Israelites (1 Sam. vii. 14), but appears here, and at xxi. 10 *sq.*, as the residence of an independent king hostile to Saul. See 1 Chron. xviii. 1, which states that David afterwards conquered it." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 3. "**Every man with his household.**" This expression forcibly marks the difference in David's circumstances now and on his former visit to Gath. Then he was alone and feared for his safety, now he is the leader of a large retinue who bring their families and settle down in the country. "Perhaps at this time he formed the friendship with Ittai the Gittite which appears in 2 Sam. xv. 19." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 5. "**Give me a place,**" etc. "David asked such a city as *property;* in ver. 6 it is expressly stated that Achish gave it to him for a possession. David's *alleged* reason for the request is that it was not suitable for him, Achish's *servant* and subject, to remain in the capital city with his large retinue." (*Erdmann.*) "David subtly suggests the expensiveness of his residence in Gath; his real motive was to be out of the way of observation, so as to play the part of Saul's enemy without acting against him." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 6. "**Ziklag.**" This city was in the territory originally assigned to Judah, but afterwards taken from them and allotted to Simeon (see Joshua xix. 5-9), but it is uncertain whether it had ever been really possessed by the people of Israel. It must have been in the south, and chap. xxx. 1 seems to favour the opinion that it was close to the Amalekite border. But it is difficult to reconcile this with the fact which Mr. Grove remarks follows from verses 9, 10 and

21 in chap. xxx. that it was north of the brook Besor, and travellers and biblical scholars are divided in their conclusions respecting its site. Some have suggested that there were two places of the same name.

Ver. 7. "**The country of the Philistines.**" "The word rendered country is peculiar. It is not *has-Shefelah*, as it must have been had Ziklag stood on the ordinary lowland of Philistia, but *has-Sâdeh*, which Dean Stanley renders *the field*. The only conclusion seems to be that Ziklag was in the south or Negeb country, with a portion of which the Philistines had a connection which may have lasted from the times of their residence there in the days of Abraham and Isaac." *(Smith's Bib. Dictionary.)*

Ver. 7. "**A full year,**" etc. *Or a year of days.* Although this word is sometimes rendered "a considerable time, it signifies," says Keil, "strictly speaking, a term of days which amounted to a full year (as in Lev. xxv. 29; see also 1 Sam. i. 3, 20; ii. 19).

Ver. 8. "**The Geshurites,**" etc. "The district of the Geshurites (to be distinguished from the little Aramæan kingdom of Geshur, 2 Sam. xv. 8, etc.; and from the northern Geshurites, near Hermon on the border of Bashan, Deut. iii. 14, etc.) lay south of Philistia near the district of the Amalekites." *(Erdmann.)* The Gerzites cannot be identified, and are not the same as the inhabitants of Gerzer (Josh. x. 33) who dwelt in the west of Ephraim. "**As thou goest to Shur,**" literally, *where from old thy coming is to Shur.* "Shur is the desert of Jifar, which is situated in front of Egypt." *(Keil.)* The clause is very difficult to render, and Erdmann reads, "David invaded the Amalekites (for these were the inhabitants of the land who inhabited of old) as far as Shur and Egypt." "The object of this attack is not mentioned, as being a matter of indifference to the chief object of the history; but it is no doubt to be sought for in plundering incursions made by these tribes into the land of Israel. For David would hardly have entered upon a war in the situation in which he was placed at that time without some such occasion, seeing that it would be almost sure to bring him into suspicion with Achish and endanger his safety." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 9. "**And came to Achish.**" Probably, "to deliver him a portion of the spoil" *(Erdmann)*, and "to deceive him as to the true character of the enterprise." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 10. "The verb *said*, like the 'went up' in Verse 8, here expresses *customary*, repeated acting. The meaning is, *Achish used to say: Against whom have ye made an incursion this time?*" *(Erdmann.)* "**David said, against the south of Judah,**" etc. "All the tribes mentioned here, and in verse 8, dwelt near one another in the district bordering on the Negeb (south country) of Judah, and stretching between the hill country of Judah and the Arabian desert. (See Josh. xv. 21.) David's expeditions were really against the tribes named in verse 8, who extended close into the south of Judah. It was his interest, however, to make Achish believe that he had made an expedition against Saul, and consequently against the men of Judah. . . . . This deception was made possible only by the fact that those tribes dwelt so near together." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 11. "**So did David.**" These words conclude the sentence, and ought to be entirely separated from what follows—the next clause not being a part of the preceding speech, but the words of the historian. "**So will be,**" rather "*So (was) his manner.*"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

The Consequences of Distrust.

I. Present circumstances of trial may lead men entirely to ignore past tokens of Divine favour. The conduct of David at this time is a remarkable illustration that this is true not only of men of ordinary faith and courage, but of those also who generally rise far above the level. We can but regard David, with all his faults, as a man of eminent faith in the character and word of God, and yet we find him here for the second time (see chap. xxi.) as full of distrust, not to say despair, as the weakest servant of God could ever be. Looking at all the deliverances of the past, and remembering all the signal tokens of the Divine favour which had been granted to him, we should have expected to hear him exclaim, "*Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast*" (Psa. lxiii. 7; lvii. 1). But when we consider how strong is the influence of

the present and the seen upon the human spirit—how much more real seems the danger of to-day than the word spoken perhaps long ago—we do not wonder so much to hear him say, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." The remedy for such an error is to be found in reflection. By the use of memory we can recall the past, and assure ourselves that it is as much a part of our lives as the present, and by reason we can become convinced that any promise of God is as worthy of confidence now as when it was uttered. If David had considered who it was that had elected him from the midst of his brethren and caused him to be anointed by Samuel, and how signal had been the deliverances which he had since experienced, he would have brought his memory and his reason to the aid of his faith, and so have saved himself from the moral failure recorded in this chapter.

II. Faith in the heart is closely connected with integrity in the life. It is doubtless true that there are men in the world who have no hold upon the invisible God and are yet honest and honourable in their dealings with their fellow men. But however much a man may love goodness for its own sake, and however keen may be his perception between right and wrong, he will have special seasons in his life in which he will find it very hard to discern the right and to hold fast to it if he have no power stronger than his own to rely upon. There are times in the history of every life when nothing but a confidence that One stronger than ourselves is on our side will keep us from giving up the struggle to do right as hopeless and worthless, and make us proof against the suggestion of the tempter that we can gain something by taking our cause into our own hands. As soon as David lost his conviction that God had him in His care and keeping, he naturally ceased to seek direction from Him, and becoming a law to himself, entered upon a course of cruelty and deception. (On this subject see also on chap. xxi. page 214).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

As a punishment for his transgression, he, who had hitherto been an object of fear and hatred to King Saul, must now be the object only of his *contempt.* Briefly but significantly the history records, "And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath; and *he sought no more again for him.*" It is plainly indicated by these words that Saul believed he had henceforth to regard the *coward* as in no way an object of fear to him. Moreover, David appeared now as a friend of the Philistines, and, consequently, as a traitor to his country; and without doubt Saul flattered himself with the hope that he would be acknowledged as such by the whole of Israel, and would be forced to renounce for ever the prospect of the throne of Israel. "*Saul sought no more again for him,*" but yet he thought about him with scornful contempt. Hitherto his satellites had seen him vomiting forth fire and flame against David; now they heard from his lips perhaps only such mocking words as these: "The deserter assigned to himself once the right name when he designated himself as only a flea before me, and as a timid partridge on the mountains." O, the disgrace which fastened itself to the heels of our friend in this course now pursued by him! Perhaps he was many a time ashamed of himself, when it came into his consciousness how he, when he was only the terrified prey in the wilderness, against which horse and horseman were sent out, was yet an altogether different man from what he was now in his supposed hiding-place among the Philistines. Some such stratagem, however, is almost always practised when believers become suitors for the favour and help of the children of this world. That they should, when distress comes, make "*flesh their arm*" at all, will give their enemies cause to triumph. And too frequently, indeed, do the malevolent

find occasion for rejoicing over such conduct. Quickly do they discern that, in order to gain their favour, the "pious" change their language in their presence, that they carefully abstain from the mode of speech in common use among the "brotherhood," and that they even accommodate themselves to many of the views of their opponents, which directly contradict the Word of God; and take refuge in ambiguous phraseology and so-called mental reservation, that they might not be guilty of an open and complete rejection of the faith. O, the contemptible treachery which Christians, by such conduct, are guilty of towards the Gospel!—*Krummacher.*

If Achish were a Philistine, yet he was David's friend, yea, his patron; and if he had been neither, it had not become David to be false. The infirmities of God's children never appear but in their extremities. It is hard for the best man to say how far he will be tempted. If a man will put himself among Philistines, he cannot promise to come forth innocent.—*Bishop Hall.*

From this section of the history we are also taught how the very highest attainments of believers are no security against a speedy fall. Seldom has grace been more triumphant than when David refrained from lifting his hand against Saul—yet his declension at Gath is the very next incident that the Spirit has recorded.—*Blaikie.*

We cannot blame David because he made expeditions against Canaanitish races and Amalekites, neither are we justified in at once accusing him of cruelty towards the conquered. The accusation would have had some foundation if he had been actuated merely by the prudential motives given in chap. xxvii. 11. But this was certainly not the case. The principal reason is rather to be sought in the Mosaic law, which declares these races to be under the curse. But it is impossible to justify his equivocation.—*Hengstenberg.*

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"Know thou assuredly."** Some expositors regard these words of Achish as designed to try David: others think they express the entire confidence which the king placed in him.

Ver. 2. **"Surely thou shalt know,"** or *Assuredly*, or *Therefore* thou shalt know. Evidently David found himself in a dilemma and gives an ambiguous answer. **"Keeper of mine head,"** *i.e.*, "captain of my body-guard—an office of great trust and high honour." (*Jamieson.*) The narrative here breaks off and is continued in chapter xxix., the historian meanwhile turning aside to relate the effect which this Philistine invasion had upon Saul.

Ver. 3. **"Saul had put away,"** *i.e.*, long before the event about to be recorded. He had expelled them from his kingdom, but the Levitical law was, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." (Exod. xxii. 18; Lev. xx. 27.) The strong denunciations uttered by God against these people seem to afford a strong proof that they were not simply deceivers of the people, but were really in direct and close communication with the spirits of evil.

Ver. 4. **"Shunem."** Now called *Solam* or Sulem, a village situated on the southern declivity of the so-called *Little Hermon*, which forms the northern boundary of the valley of Jezreel. **"Gilboa,"** a mountain range on the opposite side of the valley. "The Philistines clung as usual to the plain, which was most suitable for those war chariots of which their military armament principally consisted, and they took up an advantageous position for the free and effective use of that force in action. That of the Hebrews was badly selected." (*Jamieson.*) "The ground slopes down gradually from Shunem to the very base of Gilboa at the fountain, while the hillside rises steeply from the plain. The Philistine had all the advantage of the gentle descent in their attack—both front and flank of the Israelites were exposed to their onset, and the prospect of flight almost completely cut off by the steep hill behind." (*Porter.*)

Ver. 6. "Neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." "In the order of arrangements of these three vehicles of revelation there is a progression from the less to the greater, since in the Old Testament a subordinate position is certainly assigned to the *dream* as the medium of Divine influence on the inner life, which in sleep loses the power of self-manifestation, and sinks into a state of the extremest passivity. *Urim* is the abbreviation of Urim and Thummim (Exod. xxviii. 30: Num. xxvii. 21), which, as the *high-priestly medium* of inquiring the Divine will, stands between the *revealing dreams* and the *prophetic testimony*. But since the murder of the priests in Nob, the external apparatus, the *Ephod* with the Urim and Thummim had been in David's camp (see chap. xxii. 20, xxiii. 6, xxx. 7), and nothing is anywhere said of another high priest than Abiathar, who had fled to David. Thenius thence concludes that this section contradicts the narrative of chap. xxiii. . . . but after the catastrophe at Nob, Saul may well have had a new Ephod with Urim and Thummim prepared (*Keil*), and this is the more natural from Saul's independent mode of procedure in matters of religious service, and the probability that in his heated theocratic zeal he did not suffer the public service at the tabernacle to cease after the murder of the priests. . . . . Intercourse between Saul and the prophets had doubtless been broken off since the beginning of Saul's persecution of David (chap. xix.), while it continued between David and the prophets so far as circumstances permitted (chap. xxii. 5 sq.) But in his anxiety and despair Saul had now again turned to them for aid. Proof that application was made to prophets not only in great theocratical matters, but also in personal affairs, is found in chaps. ix 6 sq.; 1 Kings xiv. 1 sq.; 2 Kings i. 3." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 7. "A woman that hath," etc.; literally "*a woman, a mistress of Ob*," *i.e.*, of "a spirit by which the dead are conjured up." (*Erdmann.*) "*Ob* signifies properly a *leathern bottle*, and is applied in several passages of Scripture to magicians, because, being possessed by an evil spirit, and swollen by inhalation of some gaseous substance, which made them pant and heave, they spoke with a soft hollow voice, as out of a leathern bottle." (*Jamieson.*) **"Endor."** On the northern declivity of Little Hermon, so that the Philistine camp lay between it and Gilboa. Dr. Thomson remarks, "Poor Saul! It was a fearful ride that dark night. . . . He probably kept to the east of Jezreel, crossed the valley below Ain Jalûh, and thence over the shoulder of this Jebel-ed-Dûhy (Little Hermon) to Endor, but it must have been perilous in the extreme, and nothing could have induced Saul to venture thither but the agony of despair."

Vers. 11 to 19. Biblical students take three different views of the event here narrated. Some regard the whole as a mere deception; others think that Samuel really appeared, while many believe that an evil spirit was permitted by God to assume the appearance of the prophet. We accept the latter view, but subjoin the arguments used in favour of the other two. Dr. Chandler says: "The more thoroughly I consider it, the more thoroughly I am convinced that there was no appearance of any kind of spirit, or phantom, at all, and that Samuel was not consulted nor gave any answers . . . indeed, there are so many marks of imposture and deceit, that may be observed throughout the entire relation, as that I have no doubt but that this conference was entirely carried on by Saul and the old witch, without the help of any spirit whatever. . . . This affair was transacted by night, the time most proper to manage deceptions of this kind—when persons are most liable to be impressed by fear and imposed on by their own imaginations. . . . Also, even Samuel himself doth not seem to have known anything of God's raising him from the dead, for he saith nothing about it . . . but expressly blames Saul for disturbing him and bringing him up. . . . If he had known that God had brought him up, he would not have complained of being disquieted by Saul. Now as Samuel knew, as well as Saul, that consulting the dead was absolutely unlawful, surely it became the prophet to reprove him for doing it, and to let him know that, though he appeared, it was not by virtue of her art, but by the immediate power of God. . . . Instead of this, he shows himself displeased with Saul for doing it, and thereby excludes God from having any hand in it." Dr. Chandler further points out that no third person was apparently present at the interview between Saul and the woman, and that Saul himself saw nothing, and only concluded that it was the prophet from the description given by the woman, who had no doubt been acquainted with Samuel's appearance during his life. He argues that she must have known who her visitor was before she consented to employ her incantations, and that she merely concealed her knowledge for a time in order that she might appear to have gained it from Samuel; also, that there was nothing in her reply to Saul that his own account of himself would not have suggested. Notwithstanding these and other objections, many modern expositors agree with Jewish commentators, and with Origen, Ambrose, and others, in supposing that Samuel did really appear to Saul. "This view," says Dr. Hengstenberg, "is in harmony with the narrative. For (1) the author says, in verse 14, that Saul *perceived*, not fancied, it was Samuel. (2.) The words which are put into the mouth of the apparition are fully worthy of Samuel, and quite unsuitable for an evil spirit. (3.) The appearing one foretells things which no human acuteness could have foreseen." Archbishop Trench, and others, in adopting this view, consider the appearance of Samuel in answer to enchantments as a fulfilment of the threat afterwards uttered, "*Everyone of the house of Israel which separateth himself from Me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to*

prophet to enquire of him concerning Me, I the Lord will answer him by Myself." (Ezek. xiv. 7.) But notwithstanding the considerations which seem to favour this view, we agree with Luther, Grotius, and other theologians of the Reformation, in believing that it was Satan himself, or one of his agents, who appeared to the woman and spoke to Saul. For, as Dr. Erdmann remarks (though in support of a different opinion), "it is expressly said in ver. 6 that God answered Saul no more, and that *for this reason, he turned from God to a sorceress.* An immediate Divine miracle is assumed, which is to be brought into union with the anti-godly attempt of the sorceress and an open act of godlessness or God-forgetfulness on the part of Saul. Support would thus be given to the superstitious opinion that departed spirits may be summoned, while the fundamental view of the Old Testament everywhere is that a return of the dead to the land of the living is not possible." He further remarks that such an appearance—if God had really been willing to permit it—could no longer have had any *religious ethical* end, seeing that the means for rousing Saul to repentance were exhausted, nor any *theocratic* end, seeing that Saul's rejection as king had already been repeatedly announced. On the other hand there can be no doubt of the intimate connection between witchcraft or sorcery and the spirits of evil. The stern denunciations of God against it prove that it was not a fancy but a fact. The damsel who brought her masters much gain by soothsaying, mentioned in Acts xvi. 16, is said to have been possessed by an evil spirit, and miraculous deeds of a certain kind are, in the Bible, attributed to such servants of Satan, as in the case of the Egyptians (Exod. vii. 11-22. In the New Testament it is said that "*Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light*" (2 Cor. xi. 14), and his working is declared to be "*with all power and signs and lying wonders*" (2 Thess. ii. 9). The reproof given to Saul is no argument against the speaker being an evil spirit; we know the Devil can quote the Word of God to serve his purpose (Matt. iv. 6), and he only did to Saul what many a wicked man has done to a fellow-creature whom he has tempted and brought to ruin—taunted him with the fruit of his evil deeds. Neither to our mind does the fact that the Scripture narrative says Samuel spoke affect the argument, as Old Testament writers often simply describe things as they appear to be.

Ver. 23. "**The bed.**" Rather the *divan*—a cushioned bench, extending along the wall of the room still found in the East.

Ver. 24. "**She hasted,**" etc. "The cookery was performed with singular despatch. . . . But this was not uncommon (see Gen. xviii. 7-8; Judges xiii. 1; Luke xv. 27-29), and is still practised in the tents of the Bedouins. A sheep or calf is brought and killed in the presence of the guests, and then, having been thrust into a large cauldron swung over the fire, the contents are taken out and placed on an immense tray, and served up amid a mass of roasted corn, boiled rice, and curdled or sour milk." *(Jamieson.)*

Verses 1 and 2 will be considered with the next chaper.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3-25.

Saul and the Woman of Endor.

I. The day of grace has its limits. It is a *day.* Our Lord spoke to the people of Jerusalem of a *day,* or a season, of God-given opportunity, which when He addressed them was gone to return no more (Luke xix. 42). When the rich man "*Lifted up his eyes . . . and said, Father Abraham, have mercy upon me,*" the answer that came back to him was: "*Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed*" (Luke xvi. 22–26). And some men by constant rejection of Divine commands and invitations create such a gulf on this side of death—a gulf only to be filled up by true repentance, for which, alas! they have no inclination.

"Try what repentance can; what can it not?
Yet what can it when one cannot repent?"

Saul was a man to whom God had given a grand opportunity to lead a noble and blessed life, by raising him to a high social position and endowing him with special gifts to discharge its duties; but he had now outlived the day of God gracious favour, and is an illustration of that most terrible of Divine threatenings: "*Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh*" etc. (Proverbs i. 24–28).

II. If men refuse the light of God's truth they will be given over to the darkness of spiritual delusion. The word of God and human history unite in declaring that he who does not become God's free servant will, in some form, be enslaved by Satan. Saul had long ago, by disobedience to God, laid himself open to such a dominion of the evil one as showed itself in his malice towards David, and now, in inspired language, his "*deceived heart hath so turned him aside that he cannot deliver his soul nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand*" (Isa. xliv. 20), and he seeks counsel and comfort through the instrumentality of a witch. Those who rejected the Incarnate Son of God, and the truth taught by His apostles, became an easy prey to the false messiahs and prophets who followed (Matt. xxiv. 24; 1 John iv. 1), and Paul tells us that God would send to those who *believed not the truth* "*strong delusion, that they should believe a lie*" (2 Thess. ii. 11). This has been the portion of the rejectors of God's revealed will, both in ancient and modern times. If Saul had taken heed to the "*Word of the Lord spoken by Samuel*" when the prophet was alive, he would not have desired or thought it possible to speak to him now by means which God had declared to be "*an abomination*," (Deut. xviii. 10-12) and those who in modern times are willing to walk by the light of the same word spoken in "*these last days by the Son of God*" (Heb. i. 1.) do not feel any wish or need to receive instruction or consolation by means of spirit-rapping, and so become the dupes either of false men or lying spirits. To all such the message of God is "*Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.* (Isa. l. 11.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 3–5. Even the worst men may sometimes make head against some sins. Saul hath expelled the sorcerers out of the land of Israel, and hath forbidden magic upon pain of death. He that had no care to expel Satan out of his own heart, yet will seem to drive him out of his kingdom. That we see wicked men oppose themselves to some sins, there is neither marvel nor comfort in it. No doubt Satan made sport at this edict of Saul: what cares he to be banished in sorcery, while he is entertained in malice? He knew and found Saul his, while he resisted; and smiled to yield thus far unto his vassal. If we quit not all sins, he will be content we should either abandon or persecute some.

Where there is no place for holy fear, there will be place for the servile. The graceless heart of Saul was astonished at the Philistines, yet was never moved at the frowns of that God whose anger sent them, nor of those sins of his which procured them.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 7. This consulting with the witch of Endor on the part of Israel's anointed king was probably as nearly the sin against the Holy Ghost as it was possible for one under the old covenant, and before the Day of Pentecost, to commit.—*Trench.*

Ver. 14. *And he stooped with his face to the ground.* This is what the devil aimed at; and it is well observed that every one that consulteth with Satan worshippeth him, though he bow not. Neither doth that evil spirit desire any other reverence than to be sought unto.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 16–19. I could wonder to hear Satan preach thus prophetically if I did not know that as he was once a good angel, so he can still act what he was. While Saul was in consultation of sparing Agag, we shall never find that Satan would lay any block in his way—yea, then he was a prompt orator to induce him into that sin; now that it is past and gone he can lade Saul with fearful denunciations of judgment. Till we have sinned, Satan is a

parasite; when we have sinned, he is a tyrant. What cares he to flatter any more when he hath what he would? Now, his only work is to terrify and confound, that he may enjoy what he hath won. How much better it is serving that Master, who, when we are most dejected with the conscience of evil, heartens us with inward comfort, and speaks peace to the soul in the midst of tumult!—*Bp. Hall.*

Shall thou and thy sons be with me; i.e. in the state of the dead. Hereby also this old deceiver would persuade Saul that the souls of all men, as well good as bad, go to the same place; seeking thereby to blot out of him all knowledge and apprehension of eternal life.—*Trapp.*

It is a grievous miscalculation which men make, when, conscious that life is passing on in the neglect of God and duty, they reckon within themselves a certain power which they imagine the approach of death will have to awaken their attention to religious duties, and to bring with it a disposition to attend to religious duties. . . . There is in such immediate prospects no necessary power to move the heart. . . . Did Saul's approaching end awaken his conscience or soften his heart?—*Miller.*

Ver. 7–20. All human art has failed to portray, all human history has failed to record, a despair deeper and more tragic than his, who, having forsaken God and being of God forsaken, is now seeking to move hell since heaven is inexorable to him; and infinitely guilty as he is, assuredly there is something unutterably pathetic in that yearning of the disanointed king, now in his utter desolation, to change words once more with the friend and counsellor of his youth, and, if he must hear his doom, to hear it from no other lips but his. . . . I know not whether the world has anything to show at all so mournful as the spectacle which we have here: namely, the gradual breaking down under the wear and tear of the world, under the influence of unresisted temptations, of a lofty soul. . . Yet as many among us as are old enough to have been able to watch the development of lives, can hardly have failed to note on the one side some who, giving little promise at the commencement of their career, have yet afterwards risen into clearness of purpose and dignity of aim. . . . while others of much rarer and ampler gifts . . . have contracted their aims and lowered their standard. . . What is the explanation . . . of the Jacobs, who, with many and most serious faults, are yet elevated and exalted into Israel princes with God; and of the Esaus, who, not without a certain native generosity, separate themselves off in the end from all which is highest, and truest, and best? The explanation is not far to seek. . . . Jacob, with all his faults . . . had yet a side on which he was turned towards God . . . which was exactly what Esau had not. Dwell a little, I beseech you on that word. . . . a profane person. . . . (Heb. xii. 16)—one that is, without a fane, without a sanctuary in his soul; for whom all things were common, common as the outer court of some temple, which, unfenced and unguarded, is trodden and trampled on by the careless foot of every passer by. . . . Take, I beseech you, the lesson which the Sauls and Esaus have bequeathed us. Build on no good thing which you find in yourselves. . . . There is only one pledge for the permanence of any good thing that is in you—namely, that you bring it to God, and that you receive it back *from* God, with that higher consecration that He can give it: not now any more a virtue of this world, but a grace of the kingdom of heaven. *Trench.*

Ver. 21–25. Even in a sorceress, with all her deceptions and delusions, her wild and dreadful life, the true woman comes out at the mute appeal of misery. How kindly persuasive her words; how prompt her hospitable labours. We take leave of her, as she took leave of the ruined king, with a pitying heart.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XXIX.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—"**Aphek.**" This place must either have been situated in the plain of Jezreel or Esdraelon, or on the road thither, and therefore must not be confounded with the cities mentioned in Josh. xii. 18, xix. 30, and 1 Kings xx. 26. It is generally considered that it was neither identical with the Aphek mentioned in chap. iv. of this book, but Mr. Grove (*Smith's Bib. Dict.*) thinks it may have been the same place, and that the Philistines were then on their march to Jezreel by the road which still exists. "**A fountain in Jezreel,**" rather "*the* fountain." Now "*Ain Jalût,*" the fountain of Goliah (probably so called because it was the reputed scene of the defeat of Goliah), a large and copious spring, which, from under a cavern in the conglomerate rock which there forms the base of Gilboa, forms a beautiful and limpid pool of more than forty feet in diameter. "There is every reason," says Robinson, "to regard this as the ancient fountain of Jezreel, where, too, in the days of the crusades, Saladin and the Christians successively encamped."

Ver. 3. "**Then said the princes,**" *i.e.*, the princes of the other cities of Philistia, not the courtiers of Achish. "As it is said in ver. 11 that David returned to the land of the Philistines, and according to chap. xxx. 1 they reached Ziklag after a three days' march, the objection must have been made on Israelitish soil, or near the Palestinian border." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 3. "**These days, or these years.**" An indefinite statement of time.

Ver. 4. "**Let him not go down.**" "*Go down* is a regular technical military expression, derived from the necessity in that military country of going into the plain to fight." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 6. "**As the Lord liveth.**" This oath is to be explained not by the fact that a Hebrew is here the narrator, or that Achish had learned to know and honour the God of Israel, but by his desire to attest more strongly the truth of his words." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 8. "**My lord,**" etc. "These words might be understood as meaning either Achish or Saul." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 10. "**Thy master's servants,**" *i.e.*, the subjects of Saul.

Note.—We learn from 1 Chron. xii. 19-22 that when David was leaving Aphek he received into his band a large number of fresh adherents from the tribe of Manasseh, seven of whom were afterwards captains in the army of Israel. It is uncertain whether these men joined David before or after the battle of Gilboa; some have conjectured that they were fugitives from that fatal field.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF CHAPTER XXVIII, 1 *and* 2, *and CHAPTER XXIX.*

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD AND MAN.

I. The short-sightedness of the providence of man. Even godly men are sometimes so unlike their better selves as to take the responsibility of their lives out of God's hand into their own, and by ordering their actions without any reference to His will, to become, as it were, their own providence. Saul, in common with all who have never exercised a real faith in God, had done this throughout the greater part of his public life, and his endeavour to be independent of his God had resulted, as it always must, in being enslaved by the devil. David at this time gives up trust in God and seeking His guidance, and trusts in his own sagacity to guide him and secure him from evil. But in providing for the safety of his body he did great damage to his character, and found that the act of deception with which he began this method of preservation, must even be followed by another and another sin so long as he was unwilling to return to God's way. We can well believe that when he first began to shape his own course, he did not expect to find himself one day marching against his countrymen with the enemies of Israel and God. But when a man thus takes his life into his own keeping, he knows not what a net of spiritual danger he begins to weave for himself.

II. The forbearance and the omnipotence of the providence of God. It is but just to David to suppose that he was at least ill at ease, perhaps very unhappy

when he found himself in the position described in this chapter—a position so entirely unworthy of him, and so dishonouring to God, and one from which he could not have set himself free without incurring disgrace and danger. But the God who had taken him from the sheepfold to feed His people, here displays His forbearance no less than His power. The men who have the most moral strength have the most pity for human weakness, and are the most ready to help a wandering soul to return to the right path, and if we reason upwards we know that the best of all beings must be more pitiful and more ready. And as His omnipotence is as great as His power, it is always possible for Him to make a way of escape for His children, and this He will do even when their sin has brought them into perplexity and disgrace, if He sees that they are in a condition of soul to profit by such a deliverance. That He delivered David on this occasion is not less a proof of His pity than of His wisdom.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Let us here learn that the too great favour of great rulers, in so far as they are not richer in the fear of God than Achish, toward a man who desires to walk in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham, is especially dangerous. They exact altogether too great a tax for the favour which they bestow. If they are kind, one must be in all things accommodating to them—the tender conscience may say to that what it will. In the bonds of their favour one walks as a prisoner. The mistrust of the Philistine princes helped David out of the difficulty into which he had hurried himself through the favour of Achish. So the favour of godless nobles, when it is blended with somewhat of *fear*, is more advantageous than their favour alone. The godless nobleman, who is an enemy of God, must know that he has as a servant a friend of God, a servant of Jesus Christ, an upright and believing son of Abraham, to whom he dare impute no folly and wickedness. Consequently this servant must not dissemble as David did with Achish, but profess his faith, trusting in God at all times. Achish, who was formerly a worshipper of idols, solemnly assured David by Jehovah that he pleased him, and said to him that he regarded him as upright; yea, that he was pleasing in his sight as an angel of God. But he held him as an enemy of Israel, and this David indeed was not. But that David was held as one was the result of his own culpable hypocrisy. Let the whole truth be confessed where occasion is given for it; and if one indeed finds it advisable to hold back a part of it, let him at least say nothing contrary to it; otherwise sooner or later he brings himself into great danger.

What wholesome effects are produced under God's guidance by that intercourse which in the world is indispensably necessary between those who have part in God's kingdom and those who stand aloof from it. I. For those who stand aloof from the kingdom of God: (1) That they involuntarily give honour to the living God; (2) That they recognise in those who belong to His kingdom the power of a higher divine character, and are compelled to bow before that power (ver. 9); (3) That in themselves the remains of a divine image again come forward, and they find pleasure in that which is ethically good and beautiful. II. For those who have part in God's kingdom themselves: (1) The consoling conception that even they who stand aloof from God's kingdom have to serve as instruments for the fulfilment of the Divine purposes (Prov. xvi.-7). (2) The wonderful confirmation of the truth that all things must work together for good to them that love God. (3) Humbling self-knowledge in respect to their own sins and faults, in view of the morally noble behaviour of those who stand aloof from the kingdom of God, while they themselves are wanting therein. — *Trans. of Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XXX.

Ver. 1. "The south," or the *Negeb*, the south country, so called by the Israelites as being the southern part of Palestine.

Ver. 2. "They slew not any." Not from motives of humanity, but because they reserved them for slaves.

Ver. 6. "The people spake," etc. "Because they sought the occasion of their calamity in his connection with Achish, with which many of his adherents may very probably have been dissatisfied." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 9. "The brook Besor." "Supposed to be Wady Sheriah, the deep bed of a winter torrent, which is distinctly traceable from the adjoining heights, in its sinuous course up to its source, far away in the distant hills of Judah. It is about thirty yards in width, and is flanked by high precipitous banks, pouring in the rainy season a copious volume of muddy water into the sea, but dwindling to a few stagnant pools in the dry season. The verdant bank of a stream naturally offered a convenient rest to the soldiers who, through fatigue, were unable to continue the pursuit." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 11. "An Egyptian." Taken by the Amalekites from his own country and retained as a slave.

Ver. 11. "Bread," rather *food*, the kind being afterwards specified.

Ver. 12. "Cake of Figs," etc. See on chap. xxv. 18. **"Three days,"** etc. According to the Oriental mode of reckoning, three consecutive parts of days were reckoned three days" (Jonah i. 7; Matt. xii. 40, etc.). (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 14. "Cherithites." Doubtless a Philistine tribe (see Ezek. xxv. 16; Zeph. ii. 5). **"Caleb."** That portion of the Negeb which belonged to Caleb's family. "The three regions which the Amalekites invaded are named from West to East. We hence see that the plundering expedition extended over the whole south country." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 15. "God." *Elohim*, not as in the case of Achish, by *Jehovah*.

Ver. 17. "From the twilight," etc. Keil understands this to mean from one evening until the following one; but it seems more reasonable to refer the twilight to the early dawn, and so to conclude that the pursuit only lasted one day, and that David surprised them by a night march; *to the evening*, etc., may be read *toward the next day*, which according to Hebrew reckoning began in the evening. (See *Erdmann.*)

Ver. 20. The second clause of this verse is not, in the original, connected with the first, neither is the word *other* in the original. The verse is obscure, but the context shows that David not only recovered his own cattle, but took some from the Amalekites. (See verses 26-31.)

Ver. 23. "My brethren." "By this address he speaks to their hearts, and at the same time alludes to the fraternal relation in which they all stand to one another." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 25. "So it was," etc. A similar law in Num. xxxi. 27, only there the division is between the soldiery and those who stayed at home, the former having the advantage. David's rule was perhaps a special application of the general principle; it was in force in the time of the Maccabees. (*Transl. of Lange's Commentary.*)

Verses 27-31. The inhabitants of the cities and villages here enumerated had without doubt shown kindness to David during his wanderings in the wilderness of Judah; they were all, so far as they can be identified, situated in the territory of Judah and Simeon, and with the exception of *Hebron* (see on 2 Sam. ii. 1), they are unimportant. *Bethel* is not the famous city of that name, but probably *Bethuel* (1 Chron. iv. 30), or Bethul, in the tribe of Simeon (Josh. xix. 4)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.

David Avenges the Plunder and Burning of Ziklag.

I. Return to the path of duty will not ensure deliverance from all the consequences of transgression. We may well take for granted that David had

seen the folly and sin of taking his own counsel and ordering his own path, instead of seeking for Divine guidance and resting in the Divine promise; and that he left the camp of Achish, feeling that his "*soul had escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler;*" that "*the snare was broken,*" and that his "*help was in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth*" (Psa. cxxiv. 7, 8). But when he found what a calamity had befallen his family and his followers during his absence, and when he was upbraided as the cause of the misfortune, he learned a lesson which was repeated with a terrible emphasis in his later life, that the effects of sin often long outlive repentance and pardon.

II. But return to God in the way of duty will deliver from the worst consequences of transgression. Herein lies the all-important difference between Saul and David at this time. They had both been found in places entirely inconsistent with their calling, and unworthy of the honour which God had put upon them, and in both lack of faith in God was the cause of their fall. And chastisement had come to both in consequence—not only had Saul been brought into great straits, but David also had found himself in a position which to him must have been one of most painful perplexity. But here the analogy between them ceases, and the contrast begins. The retribution which came upon Saul drove him to yet more daring disobedience to God, even to an act of the most open defiance of His authority; but the retribution which fell upon David brought him back to the path of obedience, and when he was again in it the wall of separation which his sin had built up between God and his soul was broken down, and he could again look up to Jehovah for direction in his difficulties. Although he had not yet paid all the penalty of his wandering, the worst effect of it was done away with when he could in confidence inquire of the Lord in His appointed way. Henry says, "The only way to flee from God is to flee to Him," and David, in common with all who have known both the bitterness of sin and the sweetness of pardon, proved this now and on many other occasions.

III. A sudden transition from adversity to prosperity is a revelation of character. The sunlight not only causes the flowers to spring out of the ground, but it also draws forth many creeping things which the frost held hidden beneath the surface. And prosperity has the same twofold effect upon human souls. While it enlarges the heart of the truly great man, and causes him to remember with gratitude the friends who have helped him in the time of need, it often narrows the ignoble soul, and makes a selfish man more selfish than he was before. For men are not covetous because they are poor, nor liberal because they have abundance; that which a man has does not make him what he is, or wealth and a bountiful disposition would always go together. The sudden good fortune which came at this time to David and his followers revealed the difference in their disposition; for while he desired that as many as possible should share in it, they would have withholden a portion from those of their own company who had been unable to go with them to the battle. But the root of this difference is to be found in this case, as in all similar cases, in the opposite view which men take of the wealth which they possess. In David's estimation it was "*that which the Lord hath given us*" (verse 23); in the eyes of his men it was "*the spoil which we have recovered*" (verse 22). It is only when men receive all *from* God that they use it *for* God, and in so doing make their abundance a blessing and not a curse to themselves.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 6. The holy man here liveth when his heart dieth. As the sap in winter retreateth to the root, and there is preserved, so the saint in crosses

retireth to God, the fountain of his life; and so is comforted. When David's table of earthly comforts, which for a long time at best had been but indifferently spread for him, was quite empty, he fetcheth sweetmeats out of his heavenly closet. . . . The saint in the sharpest winter sits at a good fire. When abused by strangers he can complain to and comfort himself in his Father.—*Swinnock.*

Ver. 8. If it was a duty under the Old Testament, in an enterprise pertaining to war, thus to turn first to God before resolving on anything, that yet the spirit of the Old Testament carried along with it, and did not absolutely forbid, how much more among Christians under the New Testament should nothing of the sort be done without the Divine consent.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

Ver. 13. Here is a warning to Christian nations, who have, what the Amalekites had not, a clear revelation of God's will in the Gospel with regard to slavery. It may be expected that he will visit them with retribution in mysterious ways of His Providence, when they least anticipate it, for acts of cruelty to slaves.—*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 24. This decree, that they who for good reasons (see ver. 21) tarry with the stuff shall share alike with those who go down to the battle, is not without its meaning.

In the heavenly Church of God,

"—— His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."
—*Milton.*

Moses, praying on the hill, contributed to the victory even more than Joshua fighting on the plain. And in the Christian Church provision ought to be made for prayer and meditation, and for patient study of God's word, as well as for the more active exercise of pastoral duties (see 1 Tim. iv. 13, 2 Tim. iv. 13).—*Wordsworth.*

Those that represent God upon earth, should resemble him in their proceedings. It is the just mercy of our God to measure us by our wills, not by our abilities; to recompense us graciously, according to the truth of our desires and endeavours; and to account that performed by us, which He only letteth us from performing. It were wide with us, if sometimes purpose did not supply actions. While our heart faulteth not, we that, through spiritual sickness, are fain to bide by the stuff, shall share both in grace and glory with the victors.—*Bishop Hall.*

Verses 1–26. Two Pictures. I. *The sorrowful return.* 1. He had left home without seeking the Lord's guidance—apparently to fight against the Lord's people—uncertain and unhappy. 2. He had returned, because distrusted, and sent away in dishonour. 3. He found his home in ashes and his family carried away captive. 4. His personal wretchedness was enhanced by the natural wrath of his friends. II. *The subsequent joyful return.* I. He leaves with explicit Divine direction and promise—to fight national as well as private enemies—hopeful and happy. 2. He returns victorious and honoured. 3. He has regained greater wealth than he had lost. 4. His personal joy is increased by the privilege of sending gifts to his friends. And what unites the two pictures? His sorrowful return led him to deep penitence, revived faith, and humble prayer, and from these resulted the joyful return. Sore afflictions, when rightly borne, often open the way to life's sweetest joy.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XXXI.

Ver. 1. "In Mount Gilboa." Most likely the actual battle took place on the plain, and the Israelites sought refuge on the mountain.

Ver. 3. **"Sore wounded."** Hebrew scholars generally translate here *sore afraid*, or he was *alarmed* or *trembled greatly*.

Ver. 3. **"He was sore afraid."** The armourbearer was responsible for the king's life. Jewish traditions say that this man was Doeg.

Ver. 6. **"All his men."** In 1 Chron. x. 6 it is "*all his house*." "Certainly Abner, who was no doubt in the battle, had not fallen, but that is not inconsistent with the statement, since he, as Saul's general, belonged strictly speaking neither to the *house* nor to the *men*, by which term we must understand the soldiers who were near the king's person, his body-guard, as it were." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 7. **"The men of Israel on the other side,"** etc. "The *plain* is the lowland between Mount Gilboa and Little Hermon, the continuation of the plain of Jezreel, into which the battle passed. . . . The Jordan with its west bank terrain formed the border. Those who from the station of the narrator (which we must take with Kiel to be the battlefield) dwelt beyond, that is, opposite him on the mountain terrain beside the plain and in the Jordan flats" (*Erdmann*) were those who fled. **"Came and dwelt."** Not immediately; but this district eventually fell into their hands.

Ver. 9. **"And sent."** Hebrew scholars here read *sent them*, *i.e.*, the weapons and the head of Saul and probably those of his sons.

Ver. 10. **"Ashtaroth."** The plural form of *Ashtoreth*, the principal female divinity of the Phœnicians, as Baal was the principal male divinity, identical with the *Astarte* of the Greeks and Romans, who was by many ancient writers identified with the goddess Venus, as well as also with the planet of that name. (See *Smith's Bib. Dict.*) **"Beth-shan."** The present *Beisan*, in the Jordan valley, twelve miles south of the Sea of Galilee and four miles west of the Jordan. The royal heads, we learn from 1 Chron. x. 10, were fixed in the temple of Dagon. "Thus the trophies of their great victory were divided among their several deities." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 11. **"Jabesh-Gilead."** See on chap. xi. 1.

Ver. 12. **"Went all night."** "Considering that Bethshan is about three hours distance, and by a narrow upland passage to the west of the Jordan, the whole being a journey of about twelve miles, they must have made all expedition to travel thither, to carry off the headless bodies and return to their own side of the Jordan in the course of a single night." (*Jamieson.*) **"Burnt them."** This was not a Hebrew custom, and was either resorted to to prevent any further insult from the Philistines or, more likely, seeing that only the flesh was burned, because of the mangled and decomposed condition of the corpses.

Ver. 13. **"A tree,"** rather *the tamarisk*, the article indicating that the site was well-known. David afterwards caused the bones to be removed to Saul's family burial place (2 Sam. xxi. 11-14).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-7.

The Defeat at Gilboa.

I. The culminating calamity of many resulting from the answering of a self-willed prayer. The unanswered request of a child by his parent is often the greatest act of kindness that parent can bestow; unhappy, indeed, would that child be who had all he asked for, and no parent who has any regard for only the bodily life of his offspring ever thinks of granting all their requests. And with parents whose concern for their children extends to their intellectual and moral well-being it is often needful to deny more petitions than they grant. It is exactly so with men and God; if men had at all times received from Him all that their ignorance and wickedness desired the human race would before now have become extinct through its own sin and consequent misery. But as

the father of the prodigal did not refuse the request of his wayward son, but let him taste the fruit of having what he demanded, so God sometimes answers the self-willed prayers both of individuals and of nations, that they may know from experience whether they or God know best. As the swine-herding in the far country was the outcome of the answer to "*Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me,*" so was this fatal day on Gilboa the outcome of the answer to "*Nay, but we will have a king.*" "*I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.*" (Hosea xiii. 11.) So must it always be with those who *will* have what God would rather not give.

II. A calamity involving both the innocent and the guilty. One man, at least, who fell at Gilboa was innocent of both the national and individual sin which brought the judgment. The king of Israel had forsaken God, and therefore the once brave man trembled and fled before those whom—with the consciousness of God on his side—he would have faced and defied, and so the heathen foe triumphed over God's anointed. And whatever may have been the character of the others who fell, Jonathan's fate was not the result of his personal transgression but of his father's sin, and says to us in plain language that no sinner harms only himself, and that the good often in this world suffer because of the bad. All relationships of life have some influence upon our earthly destiny, but none is so potent for good or ill as that which the parent holds to his child. But if Jonathan is a sad illustration of this truth, he is also a cheering proof that if a son must suffer for his father's character he need not walk in that father's footsteps.

III A calamity which failed to change the heart of the greatest sufferer in it. The last act of Saul is in keeping with the one in which he first openly departed from God. His disobedience in the early part of his reign proclaimed a man who would choose his own method of life rather than the Divine purpose concerning him, and even this last and crushing judgment failed to break his self-will, and he who would not leave the ordering of his life to God would neither let Him ordain the manner of his death. So also as the prominent thought in the matter of the Amalekites was not the sin against God but the disgrace before men, now it is not the retribution which awaited his spirit, but the dishonour which might come to his body. It is the same man who fears now nothing so much as the sword of the uncircumcised, as formerly dreaded most the loss of position among his subjects (chap. xv. 30).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 2. 1. God would hereby complete the vexation of Saul in his dying moments and the judgment that was to be executed upon his house. If the family must fall, Jonathan must fall with it. 2. He would hereby make David's way to the crown more clear and open. For though Jonathan himself would have cheerfully resigned all his title and interest to him, yet it is very probable that many of the people would have made use of his name for the support of the house of Saul. . . 3. God would hereby show us that the difference between good and bad is to be made in the other world, not in this. —*Henry.*

Ver. 4. In this way did Saul shrink from adversity; he went forth glorying in his majesty, the anointed of the Lord, king over the chosen people of God; the battle turns against him, he is sore-wounded of the archers and . . . seeks in death a cure for the anguish of wounds and the shame of defeat. . . . What would the world now have been if it had always been said, "because the archers smite me sore, and the battle goes against me, I

will die?" Alas! man has gained all his joy by his pains; misery, hunger, and nakedness have been his teachers, and goaded him on to the glories of civilised life; take from him his unyielding spirit, and if he had lived at all, he would have lived the most suffering creature of the forest.—*Sydney Smith.*

The evil spirit had said, the evening before, "To morrow thou shalt be with me;" and now Saul hasteth to make the devil no liar; rather than fail, he gives himself his own mittimus. O the woful extremities of a despairing soul, plunging him ever into a greater mischief, to avoid the less! He might have been a patient in another's violence, and faultless; now, while he will needs act the Philistine's part upon himself, he lived and died a murderer: the case is deadly, when the prisoner breaks the jail, and will not stay for his delivery; and though we may not pass sentence upon such a soul, yet upon the fact we may: the soul may possibly repent in the parting; the act is heinous, and such as, without repentance, kills the soul.—*Bp. Hall.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8—13.

The Gratitude of the Men of Jabesh Gilead.

I. The courageous impulses of grateful hearts. Gratitude may be almost regarded as an instinct of human nature, for it springs up spontaneously in the breast of man in answer to benefits received. He who does not experience this emotion must be hardened below the brute, for even some of the lower animals will remember benefits conferred, and love him who has done them a service. But the *strength* and *length* of the gratitude will depend much on the disposition and character. All men are prone to forget benefits conferred long ago, and only true and loyal hearts keep their memory green, and are found willing to recognise them at their own risk. Many years had passed since Saul earned the gratitude of the men of Jabesh Gilead, and his later life had tended rather to efface than to perpetuate the recollection of that act of bravery. And very considerable must have been the danger which they now encountered in rendering him this last service—the only one which could now be rendered to one who had put himself beyond any other. But their gratitude and courage were equal to the occasion, and shed the only ray of light that brightens this dark picture.

II. The lasting influence of a good deed. The life that had begun in so much promise had ended in gloom, and it seems almost impossible to recognise in this fearful and despairing man the brave soldier-king by whom, at Jabesh, "the Lord had wrought salvation in Israel" (chap. xi. 13). But in this day of his shame, and when he is justly reaping the reward of his evil deeds, this good one is not to be forgotten but receives its reward. Truly,

"The evil that men do lives after them,"

but so also, happily, does the good.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This book began with the birth of Samuel, but now it ends with the death of Saul, the comparing of which two together will teach us to prefer the honour that comes from God before any of the honours which this world pretends to have the disposal of.—*Henry.*

In the greatness and the reverse of the house of Saul is the culmination and catastrophe of the tribe of Benjamin. The Christian fathers used to dwell on

the old prediction which describes the character of that tribe, "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and in the evening he shall devour the spoil." These words well sum up the strange union of fierceness and of gentleness, of sudden resolves for good or evil, which run, as hereditary qualities do often run, through the whole history of that frontier clan. Such were its wild adventures in the times of the Judges; such was Saul, its first king; such was Shemei, of the house of Saul, in his bitterness and his repentance; such was the divided allegiance of the tribe to the rival houses of Judah and Ephraim; such was the union of tenderness and vindictiveness in the character of Mordecai and Esther, if not actual descendants of Shemei and Kish, as they appear in the history of Saul, at least claiming to be of the same tribe, and reckoning among the list of their ancestors the same renowned names. And is it a mere fancy to trace with those same Christian writers the last faint likeness of this mixed history, when, after a lapse of many centuries, the tribe once more for a moment rises to our view; in the second Saul, also of the tribe of Benjamin? Saul of Tarsus, who, like the first, was at one time moved by a zeal bordering almost upon frenzy, and who, like the first, startled all his contemporaries by appearing among the Prophets the herald of the faith which once he destroyed; but, unlike the first, persevered in that faith to the end the likeness in the Christian Church, not of what Saul was, but of what he might have been.—*Stanley.*

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 6. **"The chariots and horsemen."** It has been remarked that it is extremely unlikely that chariots and horsemen pursued the Israelites on to the mountains, and this statement has been generally regarded as a part of the falsehood of the whole story, which is throughout at variance with the account in the last chapter.

Ver. 7. **"Here am I," etc.** This statement also, as Kiel remarks, has about it the air of untruth, for it is extremely improbable that Saul would have no Israelite by his side to whom to address his request.

Ver. 9. **"Anguish."** From a verb meaning to *interweave*, or *work together*; hence some translate "My *cuirass* hindereth me," etc., but Keil, Erdmann, Kunchi, and others *cramp*. Gesenius reads, giddiness, vertigo.

Ver. 10. **"Crown,"** rather *diadem*. **"A small metallic cap or wreath, which encircled the temples, serving the purpose of a helmet, with a very small horn projecting in front, as the emblem of power." "Bracelet," *i.e.*, "the armlet worn above the elbow, an ancient mark of royal dignity."** (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 12. **"The people of Jehovah" and the House of Israel** are distinguished from one another, according to the twofold attitude of Israel, which furnished a double ground for mourning. Those who had fallen were first of all members of the people of Jehovah, and secondly, fellow-countrymen. (*Keil.*) "They were, therefore, associated with them both according to the flesh and according to the spirit, and for that reason they mourned the more." (*Schmidt.*)

Ver. 13. **"A Stranger," etc., *i.e.* "An Amalekite who had emigrated to Israel."** (*Keil*). Although most Bible students regard the Amalekite's story as untrue, yet Josephus adopts it. Wordsworth thinks it may be supplementary to the former account, and that though Saul was the author of his own death, inasmuch as he did what he could to destroy himself, yet he was despatched at last by the Amalekite, and remarks, "If the story be true, it is worthy of remark that Saul owed his death to one of that nation of Amalek, which he had been commanded by God to destroy."

Ver. 15-16. Although some commentators think that this action of David was a political one, most believe that he was moved by a higher motive, and that according to Erdmann "he acted theocratically with perfect justice in slaying with holy anger the murderer of the Lord's anointed."

Ver. 17. **"Lamented—Lamentation."** These words must be understood in a technical sense. . . . This lamentation has a peculiar interest as being the only specimen preserved to us of David's secular poetry. (*Bib. Commentary.*)

Ver. 18. **"The bow."** This is the name given to the dirge probably on account of its warlike character. **"The use of."** These words are improperly inserted in the English version. **"The Book of Jasher."** Or, the book of the *righteous* or the "*uprighi ones*." "It was in existence before the Books of Joshua and Samuel (Josh. x. 13), and contained (judging from the extracts) a collection of songs on specially remarkable events of the Israelitish history, together with a celebration of the prominently pious men whose names were connected with these events." (*Erdmann.*) Other conjectures have been formed about this book, but they appear unworthy of attention.

Ver. 19. **"The ode" (which here begins) "is arranged in three strophes, which gradually** diminish in force and sweep (viz., verses 19–24, 25–26, 27), and in which the vehemence of sorrow is gradually modified, and finally dies away. Each strophe opens with the exclamation, *How are the mighty fallen!* The *first* contains all that had to be said in praise of the fallen heroes; the deepest mourning for their death, etc. The *second* commemorates the friendship between David and Jonathan. The *third* simply utters the last sigh, with which the elegy becomes silent." (*Kiel.*)

Ver. 19. Some read the first stanza, "*Thy glory, O Israel, upon thy heights (is) slain.*" De Wette, Kitto, Stanley, and others, for glory read *gazelle*, and Ewald refers it to Jonathan. "But this," says Erdmann, "in the absence in the song of any comparison with the gazelle, or any allusion to its swiftness and agility, is untenable, because the song speaks throughout not of one hero but of two. As the composition has the ring of a hero song in honour of these two, who were, in fact, the hero glory of Israel, we must render the word glory, ornament."

Ver. 20. "**Gath, Askelon.**" "These two Philistine cities as the most prominent, are named for the whole land, which they represent (Gath very near, Askelon at a distance on the sea.") (*Erdmann.*) "**Lest the daughters,**" etc. Referring to the Oriental custom of the celebration of victories by the women of the nation. (1 Sam. xviii. 6, etc.)

Ver. 21. "**Fields of offerings,**" or *of first-fruits, i.e.*, fields from which were taken the first-fruits, which were, of course, the most fruitful. The last clause of this verse should be read without the italics in the authorised version—"*The shield of Saul not anointed with oil.*" It was customary to clean and polish the shield with oil (see Isa. xxi. 5), and this expression denotes its defilement and unfitness for war consequent upon the defeat of its owner.

Ver. 24. "**With delights,**" "or with lovelinesses; *i.e.*, in a lovely manner." (*Keil.*) All the adornments here enumerated were probably the spoils of war.

Ver. 25. "**O Jonathan.**" "David's union of heart with his *friend* differences this lament sharply from the foregoing over him and Saul as *heroes.*" (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 27. "**Weapons of war.**" Not the materials of warfare but the heroes themselves.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–16.

The Deceiver Deceived.

I. Those who plan to deceive others are often deceived by means of their own plan. This is a principle of Divine working which is continually manifesting itself. When the sons of Jacob laid a plot to rid themselves of their brother, and to prevent the fulfilment of his dreams, the deception which they thus practised on their father was the first step by which Joseph ascended to the rulership of Egypt. In the case before us we have a man who, having conceived a plan of deception, brought it forth in falsehood, hoping thereby to gain a great reward. But this scheme of his, instead of bringing him the praise and the preferment for which it had been planned, brought him the condemnation and death which his deception merited as much as the deed for which David judged and punished him.

II. Bad men judge others by their own moral standard. The untoward issue of this plan of the Amalekite arose from his mismeasurement of the man with whom he had to deal. He knew what his own feelings would be if he were in David's case, and had no other rule by which to judge actions except the amount of fancied good or ill they brought to himself. So is it with all bad men. Their own supposed interest is the measure of all things—self is first, and often last, and if righteousness and mercy mingle at all with their plans and purposes, it is only when they do not hinder the main object of their existence. Hence they cannot understand a man who sorrows over anything that is not a personal and material loss, and still more are they puzzled to comprehend him who is displeased at a deed which brings him gain, or who grieves over the fall of others when that fall is a stepping-stone to his own elevation. This heathen of the olden time was not farther removed from David's standpoint of action than men of the world now are from that of the spiritual man.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

David's course in this matter was the *best policy* for him; but we have no right to conclude from that fact that he was led to it by considerations of policy. He had himself shown, on an occasion of great temptation, that reverence for the Lord's anointed of which he here speaks. The fact that "honesty is the best policy" will not of itself alone make a man honest; but neither does it *prevent* a man's being honest, or give us a right to

suspect a good man's motives.—*Transr. of Lange's Commentary.*

David had been long waiting for the crown, and now it is brought him by an Amalekite. See how God can serve his own purpose of kindness to his people, even by designing men who aim at nothing but to set up themselves.—*Henry.*

There is something very humiliating—something peculiarly distressing, because felt to be deeply degrading, in this very circumstance of having been so misunderstood and misjudged as to have been supposed capable of finding gratification in acting out principles which rule minds of another order, and of sympathising with the courses to which these principles conduct. There is scarcely a trial which is more hard to endure, or which pierces the heart with so deep a pang, than thus to find one's self standing in the estimation of a man whose feelings and principles are low, on that same low platform which marks his own moral position, and side by side with himself.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17-27.

David's Lament over Saul and Jonathan.

I. The truly great can separate the man and the enemy. We cannot do David the injustice to suppose that any of the language which he here uses is anything but the expression of the feelings of his heart—that any word of praise which occurs here is used merely for effect, or is an exaggeration of what he felt to be truth. How, then, was it possible for him so to regard the man who had now for so many years made him an exile—who had made his youth and early manhood a season of unceasing anxiety and danger? To be able honestly to render such a tribute to Saul's memory, David must have been able to look at the man quite apart from the treatment which he had received from him—to put entirely aside the hatred with which he knew Saul regarded him, and to look at him not only without prejudice but with pity, and thus sincerely to mourn over his sins and his sorrows.

II. The truly great think their own advancement as nothing compared with God's honour. The first and ruling emotion in the breasts of most men in David's place would have been—if not gratification at the downfall of an enemy, yet of exultation at being delivered from his persecution and being once more free to return in safety to his native land. And with the remembrance of the anointing oil upon his head, no one in whom all thoughts of a personal nature were not swallowed up in anxiety for the public good could have avoided looking forward with anticipation to the issue of this great event. But such a man as David found more matter of mourning in the triumph of the uncircumcised than of rejoicing in his own altered prospects. It was more to him that the God of Israel had been dishonoured in the eyes of the heathen than that the heavy cloud was lifted from his own future. In all his conduct at this time he showed that true nobility which is only possible to him who makes God, and not himself, the centre of the universe.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

I believe it is not dangerous but safe, not a homage to falsehood but to truth, in our judgments of those who are departed, to follow David's example. We may dwell upon bright and hallowed moments of lives that have been darkened by many shadows, polluted by many sins; these moments may be welcomed as revelations to us of what God intended His creature to be; we

may feel that there has been a loveliness in them which God gave them, and which their own evil could not take away. We may think of this loveliness as if it expressed the inner purpose of their existence; the rest may be for us as though it were not. As Nature, with her old mosses and her new spring foliage, hides the ruins which man has made, and gives to the fallen tower and broken cloister a beauty scarcely less than that which belonged to them in their prime, so human love may be at work too, "softening and concealing, and busy with her hand in healing" the rents that have been made in God's nobler temple, the habitation of His own Spirit.—*Maurice.*

Verse 12. The only deep mourning for Saul, with the exception of that of the Jabeshites, proceeded from the man whom he had hated and persecuted for so many years even to the time of his death; just as David's successor wept over the fall of Jerusalem, even when it was about to destroy himself.—*Von Gerlach.*

Ver. 26. Passing the love of woman? How can that be? we of these days shall say. What love can pass that, saving the boundless love of Him who stooped from heaven to earth that He might die on the cross for us? No. David, when he sang these words, knew not the depth of a woman's love. And we shall have a right so to speak. The indefeasible and divine right which is bestowed by fact. As a fact we do not find among the ancient Jews that exalting and purifying ideal of the relations between man and woman which is to be found, thank God, in these days, in almost every British work of fiction or fancy. It is enunciated, remember always, in the oldest Hebrew document. On the very threshold of the Bible it is enunciated in its most ideal purity and perfection. But in practice it was never fulfilled. . . . Abraham had Sarah his princess wife. But he has others. . . . And so has David in like wise, to the grief and harm both of him and Abraham.—*Kingsley.*

If ever to the human heart of David the throne had seemed desirable as the height of worldly grandeur, detestable in the last degree would such a feeling now appear, when the same act that opened it up to him deprived him of his dearest friend—his sweetest source of earthly joy. The only way in which it was possible for David to enjoy his new position was by losing sight of self; by identifying himself more closely than ever with his people; by regarding the throne only as a position for more self-denying labours for the good of others. And in this song there is evidence of the great strength and activity of this feeling. . . . Thus both by the afflictions that saddened his heart and by the stroke of prosperity that raised him to the throne, David was impelled to that course of action which is the best safeguard under God against the baneful influences both of adversity and prosperity.—*Blaikie.*

These words of the song,—

> "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon,"

have, since that time, in the circles of the faithful, become a proverb. It is frequently heard when one of their community has failed to take heed to his ways, and therefore has given rise to a scandal. Would that that call were more faithfully observed than is for the most part the case! Would that the honour of the *spiritual* Zion lay always as near to the heart of the children of the kingdom as did that of the *earthly* to the heart of David! But how often does it happen that they even strive to disclose before the world the weaknesses of their brethren, and thus, by a repetition of the wickedness of Ham, become traitors to the Church which Christ has purchased with His own blood. Thus they make themselves guilty of bringing *dishonour* upon the Gospel, while they open the gates to such dishonour through their perhaps altogether malicious tale-bearing, and to their own great prejudice disown the charity which "believeth all things, and hopeth all things," and also "covereth a multitude of sins."—*Krummacher.*

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Hebron.**" "**A city of Judah, situated among** the mountains (Josh. xx. 7), twenty Roman miles south of Jerusalem, and the same distance north of Beersheba. Hebron is one of the most ancient cities of the world still existing, and in this respect it was the rival of Damascus. . . . It was a well-known city when Abraham entered Canaan 3,780 years ago (Gen. xiii. 18). . . . Sarah died here, and here is the famous Cave of Machpelah, the burying-place of the patriarchs. . . . At the division of Canaan it was given to Caleb (Josh. x. 36), and was assigned to the Levites and made a city of refuge. . . Its modern name is *el-Khulil, i.e., the friend*, the same designation as is given to Abraham by the Mohammedans. . . . It now contains about 5,000 inhabitants, of whom some fifty families are Jews. It is picturesquely situated in a narrow valley surrounded by hills, whose sides are still clothed with luxurious vineyards." (*Smith's Bible Dictionary.*) "This city must now have had for David a very special importance, which appeared all the clearer from the Divine decision, and in respect to his future life became indubitable; here now was to be fulfilled the old patriarchal promise (Gen. xlix. 8. s.q.) the establishment of the theocratic kingdom in the tribe of Judah." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 3. "**Cities of Hebron.**" "**The places belonging to the territory of Hebron.**"

Ver. 4. "**And the men of Judah came,**" etc. As the throne was now vacant by Saul's death—the crown never entailed upon his descendants, and his whole family rejected by God, who first advanced him to the kingdom—David, without injuring the rights of any person whatsoever, might have taken any just and honourable measures to have gained over the tribes to his interest and secured the succession, as the election of a new king now devolved upon the nation, even if he had not previously been designed by God the supreme governor of Israel. . . But as this circumstance of the consecration was known throughout the whole nation, it was natural for the tribe of Judah to seize the opportunity of Saul's death, and acknowledge him whom God had pointed out as their king. . . . It is also probable that they were further induced because of the ancient prophecy (Gen. xlix. 10). . . . This tribe was also the most powerful and respectable of all the twelve, and as they had a right to choose their own prince they might reasonably have expected that the other tribes would follow their example. (*Chandler.*)

Ver. 6. "**Kindness,**" or *favour*, "in general the gracious love that God shows His people on the ground of His covenant with them. **Truth** is the trustworthiness and attestation of all His promises." (*Erdmann.*) As this expression of thanks involved the solemn recognition of the departed king—by which David divested himself of even the appearance of a rebellion—the announcement of the anointing he had received contained an indirect summons to the Jabeshites to recognise him as their king now." (*Keil.*) "**I also will,**" etc. It is incorrect to render this in the future. It may be rendered "*I greet you with blessing*," viz., the prayer already uttered.

Ver. 7. "**Be ye valiant.**" Literally, be ye *sons of force* or strength. "The opposite are 'men of Belial,' that is, of no force of character." (*Biblical Commentary.*) "His exhortation to valour and courage is intelligible only on the supposition that he gives them to understand that for them also he has taken Saul's place as king, and that they must valiantly espouse his cause against his enemies. . . . It is not clear whether Ishbosheth had at this time been set up as king by Abner. But from verse 9 (which states that Gilead was one of the districts gained by Abner for Ishbosheth) it is evident that David, seeing Abner's movement thither (comp. 1 Sam. xxvi. 7), must have been concerned to secure to himself the capital city (Jabesh) of this province. Whether he succeeded in this is questionable." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 8. "**Took Ishbosheth.**" Rather *had taken*. "Ishbosheth had probably been in the battle of Gilboa, and fled with Abner across the Jordan after the battle had been lost." (*Keil.*) "**Mahanaim.**" On the eastern side of the Jordan, north of the brook Jabbok (Gen. xxxii. 2, 3). Ishbosheth or "**Esh-baal**" (see 1 Chron. viii. 33). Literally *son of Baal*. "It seems probable that the name *Baal* (lord) was in early times given to the God of Israel, and proper names were formed from it afterwards. When the worship of the false Baal was introduced into Israel the change into *Bosheth*, or *shame*, was made. Possibly this change was made by later editors and scribes, and the original form was retained in the Book of Chronicles because this book was less read than the prophetic historical books." (*Transr. of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 9. "**Over,**" rather *for*, etc. The use of this preposition seems to indicate that the title was assumed before the places named really became subject to Ishbosheth. "**Gilead,**" the whole of trans-Jordanic Israelitish territory. "**Ashurites.**" This name cannot be identified, and commentators vary greatly in the opinions concerning the people here referred to. "**Jezreel.**" The plain as well as the city, so-called, which had just been occupied by the Philistines, and therefore must have needed to be re-conquered by Abner. "**All Israel,**" *i.e.*, all the rest excepting Judah.

Ver. 10. "Two years." It is not quite clear how these words are to be understood, inasmuch as it seems certain that Ishbosheth was proclaimed king immediately after Saul's death, and we know that he reigned until the time (seven and a half years later) when David became king over all Israel. *He reigned two years*, may be understood to mean that five years and a half were occupied in re-conquering the territory from the Philistines, so that Ishbosheth was only a nominal king during that period. Or the last clause of verse 10 and verse 11 may be regarded as a parenthesis, and the two years taken as referring to the time which elapsed before the event recorded in the following paragraph. Each of these interpretations has been adopted by eminent Biblical scholars, but the latter seems most in keeping with the movement of Abner which is now recorded.

Ver. 12. To "Gibeon." Now "*El-Jib*" in the western part of Benjamin, about six miles north of Jerusalem. He came here, doubtless, with the view of subduing Judah also to the rule of Ishbosheth, and it is remarked by Erdmann that he would not have taken this step if he had not already subdued the Philistines.

Ver. 13. "Joab, the son of Zeruiah." This man here for the first time comes forward in the history of David. "He had no doubt already, as his brother Abishai, had a military training with his uncle, and had taken a prominent position among his warriors, else he would not now appear as the chief leader of David's forces. In the roll of heroes, in chap. xxiii. 8, his name is not given, probably because his name already stood above them all as general, as we may conjecture from chap. xxiii. 18, 24." *(Erdmann.)* Zeruiah was David's sister, and is most likely named, instead of her husband, to show Joab's relation to David. **"The pool of Gibeon."** A spring still "issues in a cave excavated in the limestone rock, so as to form a large reservoir. In the trees farther down are the remains of a pool or tank of considerable size, probably, says Dr. Robinson, 120 feet by 100." *(Biblical Dictionary.)* This is the "great water" mentioned by Jeremiah (chap. xli. 12).

Ver. 14. "Play." Here used to denote the war-play of single combat. *(Keil.)*

Ver. 15. "Went over." They probably met at some intermediate place. *(Transr. of Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 16. "Helkath-hazzurim," *i.e.*, The *field of knives*, or *sharp edges*. Everyone must recall to mind the similar combat of the Horatii and the Curatii of Roman history (Livy i. 25). "These single combats still occur among the Arabs." *(Trans. of Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 17. "A sore battle." Consequent upon the undecisive nature of the single combat.

Ver. 21. "And Abner said," etc. Abner's speaking supposes that Asahel had already overtaken him. **"Take his armour,"** *i.e.*, after slaying him.

Ver. 22. "How, then, should I," etc. "Abner did not want to put the young hero to death, out of regard for Joab and their former friendship." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 23. "The hinder end of the spear." He used the hinder end from his desire to spare Asahel's life. But owing to his great strength and prowess, the wooden end which was more or less pointed to enable the owner to stick it into the ground (1 Sam. xxvii, 7), ran into his body." *(Biblical Commentary.)*

Ver. 24. "Ammah." . . . "Giah." Nothing further is known about these places.

Ver. 27. "If thou," etc. "If thou hadst not by that challenge given the signal for the battle, then early in the morning one side would have retreated before the other, and the battle would not have occurred. . . . In Joab's address and bearing it may be seen that he would not have made the attack, but that his march against Abner was simply to protect the territory of Judah." *(Erdmann.)* Keil, Lightfoot, Patrick, Wordsworth, and others agree with Erdmann's interpretation, but others understand Joab to say, "Even if thou hadst not spoken, the pursuit would have ceased to-morrow morning."

Ver. 29. "The plain," or the "*Arabah*," the deep gorge of the Jordan. "Having marched first from the battle-field directly east towards Jericho." *(Erdmann.)* "All **Bithron,"** rather "All *the* Bithron." As the word signifies a cutting, it was probably a name given to some ravine between Jordan and Mahanaim.

Ver. 31. "Three hundred and threescore." "This striking disproportion in the numbers may be accounted for from the fact that in Joab's army there were none but brave and well-tried men, who had gathered round David a long time before: whereas in Abner's army there were only the remnants of those who had been beaten upon Gilboa, and who had been still further weakened and depressed by their attempts to recover the land which was occupied by the Philistines." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 32. "They buried him." Bethlehem lay only a little to the left of the road between Gibeon and Hebron, and about fifteen miles from the latter place.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—7.

Waiting for Orders.

In David's conduct here we have :—

I. **A recognition that God knows the best time to fulfil His promises.** Many promises are given both by human fathers and by the Divine Father to their children without any specification of the time when they will be fulfilled, and this for a good reason. For such a reservation on the part of the human parents or of God serves to test faith in a superior wisdom, and to work submission to a higher will, and so to foster and increase a truly filial spirit. And so the child or the man is by the uncertainty being fitted and prepared to receive the promised blessing in a right spirit—a spirit of grateful dependence which brings him nearer to the giver. David had long before been promised the throne of Israel—the anointing of Samuel had been such a promise, and both Saul and Jonathan had declared that such was the intention of God. At times he had seemed to doubt it, and but lately his want of faith had led him into sin, but he had doubtless upon the whole regarded it as certain that the time would come when he should be king. And now that time seemed to have arrived, but the discipline of the past had borne the fruit for which it was given, and David's confidence in God, and dependence upon Him, were not now marred by any intrusion of his own desires or opinions. By this inquiry of the Lord, he said most emphatically, "*My times are in thy hand*" (Psa. xxxi. 15), and recognised by his conduct that it was not for him to judge when God should fulfil His word. We cannot do justice to the completeness of David's self-surrender at this time, unless we contemplate the irksomeness of his present position, the strength of the desire he must have had to return to his own country, and the opportunity which Saul's death seemed to open up to him. Most men would have been unable to control their impatience, and would have counted every delay—even such a delay as this of David—as so much gain to the opposite party, but David had learned that time spent in waiting upon God is only such a delay as that which the traveller in the desert makes when he stands still to take his bearings by the stars—a delay which is the truest way to speed him on his journey.

II. **That when that time has come, the fulfilment will only be accomplished by man's active and obedient co-operation.** Although the time and the method of working are to be left to God, all the working is not to be left to Him. Faith in God makes a man willing to wait when it is God's will, but it makes him equally willing to be up and doing when the time for action has come. When God gave Canaan to the Israelites at first, although it was in fulfilment of a promise made long before, yet they were obliged to go up and fight for the land before they could possess it, and to fight according to the directions given them by God. David here shows that he does not expect God to fulfil His word to him except by means of his own active and unconditional obedience. Although the sovereignty of Israel was secure to him, he knew that he must use means to secure it, and that the means must be those which God appointed and no other. By his questions he doubly binds himself to do whatever God commands and to go wherever He directs; for if when we know the will of God we are bound to do it, we are surely under a double obligation when we ask for guidance.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. The form in which he made the inquiry shows how clear the expediency of going up to one of the cities of Judah was to his own mind; probably it was also the earnest advice of his followers; there seemed no doubt or

difficulty as to its being the proper course; but all the more on that account does his devout and pious spirit shine out, in his asking direction from God. Prayer, on this occasion, was not the resort of one whom all other refuge failed, but the first resort of one by whom the guidance of God was regarded as all-important.—*Blaikie.*

The time now came when David's faith in the existence of a righteous kingdom, which had its ground in the unseen world, and which might exhibit itself really, though not perfectly in this, was to be brought to the severest of all trials. . . . . The new mode of government for which the people craved so earnestly had been tried—they had become like the countries round about—these countries were now their masters. They had gained such a king as they had imagined—a leader of their hosts. They had lost law, discipline, and fellowship; now their hosts had perished. Could there come order out of this chaos? Whence was it to come? From a band of freebooters? That was to be seen. If the chief of this band thought of setting up a dominion for himself, of making his followers possessors of the lands from which they had been driven out, of putting down his private enemies, of rising, by the arms of his soldiers and the choice of a faction, to be a tyrant, his life would be merely a vulgar tale such as age after age has to record. . . . But if David took this miserable country of his fathers into his hands, not as a prize which he had won but as a heavy and awful trust committed to him. . . . then, however hopeless the materials with which he had to work, and which he had to mould, he might believe confidently that he should be in his own day the restorer of Israel, and the witness and prophet of the complete restoration of it and mankind. This was the man after God's own heart—the man who thoroughly believed in God as a living and righteous Being; who in all changes clung to that conviction; who could act upon it, live upon it; who could give himself up to be used as he pleased . . . who could walk on in darkness secure of nothing but this, that truth must prevail at last, and that he was sent into the world to live and die that it might prevail.—*Maurice.*

God sends him to Hebron, a city of Judah; neither will David go up thither alone, but he takes with him all his men, with their whole households: they shall take such part as himself; as they had shared with him in his misery, so they shall now in his prosperity: neither doth he take advantage of their late mutiny, which was yet fresh and green, to cashier those unthankful and ungracious followers; but, pardoning their secret rebellions, he makes them partakers of his good success. Thus doth our heavenly leader, whom David prefigured, take us to reign with Him, who have suffered with Him. Passing by our manifold infirmities, as if they had not been, He removeth us from the land of our banishment, and the ashes of our forlorn Ziklag, to the Hebron of our peace and glory: the expectation of this day must, as it did with David's soldiers, digest all our sorrows.—*Bp. Hall.*

We can see that Hebron is a fit place. The city of Abraham, Caleb, and the Levites—a city of refuge—the principal town in David's tribe, and somewhat remote from Saul's tribe—and David had taken pains to conciliate its inhabitants (1 Sam. xxx. 31). Divine directions are seen to coincide with true human wisdom wherever we sufficiently understand the facts.—*Transr. of Lange's Commentary.*

In that orderly he begins at God, we see that it is not sufficient to have good causes public or private, but in like manner it is requisite to prosecute them aright, otherwise a good cause in the matter may become evil in the preposterous (inverted in order) form, albeit the reciprocant be never true, that a good form may make an evil cause good in substance.—*Guild.*

Psalm xxvii. is traditionally referred to this part of David's life. (The lxx. gives as the title, "Before the anointing,") and the courageous and hopeful spirit which it breathes, the

confident expectation that a better day was at hand, whilst it lends itself to the manifold applications of our own later days, well serves as an introduction to the new crisis in the history of David and the Jewish Church which is now at hand.—*Stanley.*

In that Judah apart from all Israel anointed David their king, being warranted herein by the promises of God concerning the pre-eminence of that tribe, and by the manifest declaration of God's will concerning David, therefore having and following the warrant of God's will and word herein, they are not the division or schism makers, but Israel wanting the same though the greater multitude by far. It is not they, then, who separate themselves from the company or persons of men, but who separate themselves from the truth, and God's word (which is the touchstone thereof) that are schismatical or rent-makers in the Church, and all those who follow the direction of it (as Judah doth here) assuredly shall go aright, where such as contemn the same, and with Israel glory in multitude, shall go astray.—*Guild.*

Verses 5–7. People were persuaded by it that this man, uninfluenced by the low spirit of revenge and malice, knew how to forgive and to forget, and that all the wrongs and injuries which he had experienced had not the power to obscure to him the dignity and sacredness of his predecessor, as the anointed of the Lord. Moreover, by that conduct of David, the decided impression was produced among the people that they might expect from him a humane government, whilst he would also honour the lowliest and most insignificant praiseworthy actions which might be anywhere done in the land, with a thankful recognition of their worth.—*Krummacher.*

Grace and truth (ver. 6) are the fundamental attributes of God which set forth His relation to the people of Israel as the covenant people. *Grace* is the special exhibition of His love by which He (1) chooses the people, (2) establishes the covenant with them, and (3) in this covenant relation imparts favour and salvation. *Truth* is God's love unchanging and continuing over against the people's sin—love that (1) does not suffer the choice of free-grace to fail, (2) maintains the covenant, and (3) fulfils uncurtailed the promises that correspond to the covenant relation. Compare Exod. xxxii. 6; Psalm xxv. 10.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Every human work well-pleasing to God, wrought out of genuine love and truth, is a reflection of God's love and truth, of which the heart has had experience, *an offering brought to the Lord,* the impulsion of which has come from this inwardly experienced love and truth, *an object of God's love and truth which repays with blessing and salvation, and of men's honouring recognition* in respect to its ethical value.—*Lange's Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8-32.

Abner's Opposition to David.

I. Self-will is a sin that dies hard. We should have thought before experience that the humiliating disaster at Gilboa would have been sufficient to bring Abner and the men of Israel into grateful submission to God's will concerning the person who was to be their ruler. Having but barely escaped with their own lives, and having to mourn the best and bravest of their kindred, it might have been expected they would gladly welcome one under whose rule they might look for God's protection and their own consequent security and comfort. But their own way was yet so much dearer to them than God's way that to have it they were willing to enter upon all the miseries of a civil war. Abner, as he himself afterwards confesses (chap. iii. 9), knew that the Lord had sworn unto David to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, yet he is here found the

most prominent person concerned in the elevation of Ishbosheth to the kingship. If his followers could plead ignorance of the Divine will in the matter, their leader could not, and his act must be regarded as a declaration that, whatever God had said, he would do as he pleased. He was not, however, we may well believe, so honest a man as to permit himself thus to interpret his own conduct, but probably sheltered himself behind some plea of necessity or policy. The sin of Abner and his followers is the sin of all men who, when the will of God is plainly revealed either by His word or providence, set up their own in opposition to it—who, when the finger-post of duty points in one direction, choose another because they are so deluded as to fancy there is something to be gained by it.

II. The sin of one often affects the destiny of many. All the bloodshed by the pool of Gibeon on this day must be laid to the account of one man. Joab spoke truly when he said (ver. 27) that Abner's word was the spark that lighted the fire of battle which afterwards raged so fiercely, and with such special fatality among his own men. Although each man had to some extent the power of individual choice when he followed his general into the field, yet position and ability give some so great an influence over others that the few who possess them have the many in a large measure in their hands, and are the makers of their weal or woe, so far at least as this life is concerned. If such a man as Abner had not put forth a rival to David, we may conclude with certainty that there would have been no organised opposition to him, and this murderous affray and the civil strife of the following years would have been avoided. The same may be said of most of the wars that have cursed the world. They have almost all been to gratify the ambition of one or two, and thousands have been the sufferers. This dependence of the many upon the few is one of the facts of human life, and often one of its mysteries. If not an ordination of God, it is certainly a Divine permission; and unless society were all upon a dead level it is hard to see how it could be otherwise. And although this incident shows its dark side, we know it has a bright one—a side which will efface the darkness when all leaders and rulers of men have learnt of Him who rules to save and to redeem souls from deceit and violence, and in whose sight the blood of His followers is precious. (Psa. lxxii. 13, 14.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Even the Amalekite could carry the crown to him as the true owner: yet there wants not an Abner to resist him, and the title of an Ishbosheth to colour his resistance. If any of Saul's house could have made challenge to the crown, it should have been Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, who, it seems, had too much of his father's blood to be a competitor with David: the question is, not who may claim the most right, but who may best serve the faction: neither was Ishbosheth any other than Abner's stale.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 10. When David came into possession of his kingdom, even yet he remained quiet awhile, without considering how he might increase it, because he cast all this care upon Divine Providence. He thus shames the behaviour of those spiritual men, who, when they recognise that God wishes to do something through them, are constantly making attempts and all sorts of beginnings to see whether they may, perhaps, achieve the work, and are never willing in patience and self-forgetfulness to wait on God, until God Himself performs His will. The hour must come itself, and so it must simply be waited for.—*Berlenberger Bible.*

Ver. 13. A righteous war is a royal duty, from which no prince can venture to withdraw, even if it were fraternal war. It may have come hard to David

to take up war against his brothers, and yet he could not do otherwise. God the Lord had Himself given the arms into his hand.—*Schlier.*

Ver. 23. See here (1). How often death comes upon us by ways that we least suspect. Who would fear the hand of a flying enemy, or the butt-end of a spear? (2). How we are often betrayed by the accomplishments we are proud of. Asahel's swiftness, which he presumed so much upon, did him no kindness, but forwarded his fate.—*Henry.*

Verses 18–23. *(A Sunday-school address.) The rash young prince.* 1. He had a shining gift (ver. 18). In ancient warfare more were often slain in the pursuit than in the battle; and so swiftness of foot was important in a warrior. 2. He was ambitious—pursuing the distinguished general of the enemy. 3. He had decision and perseverance—turning not to the right or left, and yielding to no persuasion. 4. He fancied himself superior to an old man—a common and natural, but grave fault in the young. 5. He was slain as the penalty of self-confidence and rashness—besetting sins of many gifted youths.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 26. This may have been a mere stroke of policy, or it may have been the promptings of conscience bringing home the guilt of the slaughter to himself. What he probably meant was, that matters might remain as they were, Ishbosheth reigning over the ten tribes, and David over Judah. . . . He who had been so keen for war in the morning, was still more keen for peace in the evening, for it is not easy for a man with even a shred of conscience to think of nearly four hundred of his own brethren lying dead on the field of battle, and to remember that the responsibility of the terrific slaughter lies at his own door.—*Blaikie.*

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**The war.**" "Not continual fighting, but the state of hostility in which they continued to stand towards one another." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 3. "**Chileab.**" Called *Daniel* in 1 Chron. iii. 1. "Probably had two names." *(Keil.)* "**Geshur.**" A small independent kingdom in Syria.

Ver. 4. Nothing is known of the origin of these wives of David, nor of the one mentioned in the following verse.

Ver. 5. "**David's wife.**" This appendage to Eglah has led some to conjecture that *Michal* is here intended; but Keil and others think it merely serves as a fitting conclusion to the list.

Ver. 6. "**That Abner,**" etc. Keil here reads *and Abner*, making verses 6 and 7 into one sentence, expanded by the introduction of circumstantial clauses; the conjunction before *said* (*i.e.* Ishbosheth said), must then be translated *that*. "**Wherefore hast thou.**" As the harem of an Oriental king becomes the property of his successor, such an act on the part of Abner would be an act of political treason.

Ver. 8. "**Then was Abner very wroth,**" etc. He neither admits nor denies the charge, and most expositors regard him as guilty of the act; but as Erdmann remarks, it "seems rather the outflow of passionate self-will and presumptuous contempt towards Ishbosheth" than an attempt to secure the throne. His subsequent conduct towards David seems to contradict the idea that he had such an intention.

Ver. 9. "**As the Lord hath sworn.**" We have no record of any formal Divine *oath* such as Abner here speaks of. "But the promise of God is equivalent to an oath, as God is the true God, who can neither lie nor deceive" (1 Sam. xv. 29, etc.).

Ver. 10. "**From Dan even to Beersheba,**" *i.e.*, throughout the entire land, from north to south. (Judges xx. 1, etc.)

Ver. 11. "**And he could not answer,**" etc. "This characterises Ishboseth sufficiently for the whole situation. Having with an effort *plucked up courage* to ask that reproachful question, he here shows the greatest *feebleness, cowardice,* and *timidity* towards Abner. This also contributes to the explanation of what is said in ver. 1 concerning the house of Saul." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 12. "**On his behalf.**" Two general renderings of this phrase are found in the ancient versions, viz., *in his place,* equivalent to the English version, and "*immediately*" or "*on the spot.*" *Keil* adopts the first, but *Erdmann* the latter, remarking that it accords well with Abner's passionate excitement in ver. 9, and that the former translation makes a superfluous phrase. "**Whose is the land?**" Some expositors (*Schmidt, Keil, Ewald,* etc.) understand Abner to declare by this question that the land belonged to David by virtue of his anointing; but others (*Erdmann, Thenius,* etc.) think that the following words indicate that Abner considered the land was virtually in *his* hand. "This," says *Erdmann,* "is quite in keeping with his proud, haughty nature, as hitherto manifested in his words and conduct, and also with the facts of the case, since, in fact, the whole land, except Judah, was still subject to Saul's house, that is, to him (Abner) as dictator."

Ver. 13. "**One thing I require.**" "This condition was imposed by David, not only because Michal had been unjustly taken away by Saul, . . . so that he could demand her back again with perfect justice, . . . but probably on political grounds also, namely, because the renewal of his marriage to the king's daughter would show to all Israel that he cherished no hatred in his heart towards the fallen king." (*Keil.*) "He was led to a re-union partly by *love* ('she loved him,' 1 Sam. xviii. 27; xix. 11 *sq.*), and . . . as king he could not, in the presence of the people, leave Michal in a relation into which she had been forced against her will." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 15. "**Phaltiel.**" (See 1 Sam. xxv. 44.)

Ver. 16. "**Bahurim.**" A village near Jerusalem, north east, on the road between the Mount of Olives and Gilgal. Phaltiel followed his wife to the border of David's kingdom.

Ver. 17. "**Ye sought for David in times past.**" "A striking testimony to the fact that outside of Judah also there had been a favourable sentiment towards David, against which Abner had energetically established and hitherto maintained Ishbosheth's authority." (*Erdmann.*) (See 1 Chron. xii.) "**The Lord had spoken.**" "Abner either had some expression used by one of the prophets (Samuel or Gad) in his mind . . . or he regarded the anointing of David by Samuel by command of the Lord, and the marvellous success of all that David had attempted, as a practical declaration on the part of God." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 19. "**The ears of Benjamin.**" Because the family of Saul belonged to this tribe, and they had enjoyed many advantages in consequence. See 1 Sam. xxii. 7. "**Also . . . also.**" These denote *mutualness,* and point out the close connection and relation between the negotiation carried on with Benjamin as the tribe most important for David, and the earnest conversation that Abner therefore had with David (in the ears of David).

Ver. 20. "**Twenty men.**" "As representatives of all Israel." (*Keil.*) "**A feast.**" "Not merely an entertainment, but of the nature of a league." (*Patrick.*)

Ver. 21. "**I will arise,**" etc. The gradation in these words is characteristic of the rapidity, excitedness, and energy that we everywhere find in Abner." (*Erdmann.*) "**A league.**" "This was not to consist in the establishment of a constitution after the nature of a constitutional monarchy, which is wholly foreign to the theocratic kingdom; but they are to vow to obey David as the king given them by the Lord, he promising to govern them as the theocratic king." (*Erdmann.*) "**Thine heart desireth.**" David had indicated the desire of his heart in his message to the Jabeshites. (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 22. "**Joab came from pursuing,**" etc. "Whither, it is not said, but probably outside the Israelitish territory near the tribe of Judah. In the incomplete organisation of David's court such expeditions were necessary for the support of the large army. . . . Probably Abner had purposely chosen the time when Joab with the army was absent to carry out his plan." (*Erdmann.*)

Vers. 24 and 25. Joab may have spoken what he believed to be the truth concerning Abner, or he was prompted by a fear that the older and more renowned general would take his place at the head of David's army.

Ver. 26. "**The Well of Sirah.**" According to Josephus, only about two and a half English miles from Hebron.

Ver. 27. "**When Abner was returned.**" Joab probably used David's name to recall him. "Abner's conduct bespeaks his entire reliance upon David's good faith." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 27. "**In the gate.**" Literally "*to the middle of the gate.*" It was no doubt roofed and "Joab drew Abner to the middle of the inner gate space because it was not so light there, and one could better escape the notice of the passers-by." (*Erdmann.*) "**For the blood of Asahel.**" This was no doubt the plea which Joab used; but Abner had slain Asahel in battle and in self-defence, and Josephus and most commentators ascribe the murder to jealousy.

Ver. 29. "**Let it rest.**" Literally, *turn*, or be *hurled.* "This strong expression, instead of the ordinary 'let it come,' answers to the enormity of the crime and the energy of David's righteous anger." (*Erdmann.*) "**Hath an issue.**" "One that pines away miserably with seminal or mucous flow. Compare Lev. xv. 2." (*Erdmann.*) "**That leaneth on a staff.**" This last word means a *distaff*, and many scholars take this phrase to designate an effeminate or weakly person. "The Greeks also had their 'Hercules with the distaff' as a type of unmanly feebleness, and for a warrior like Joab there could be no worse wish than that there might be a *distaff-holder* among his descendants." (*Bottcher.*) In favour of this reading, Erdmann remarks that one that holds a *staff* is not necessarily a cripple, since the staff was held by rulers, by old men, by travellers, and by shepherds (Judges v. 14; Numb. xxi. 18; Zech. viii. 4; Luke vi. 3; Micah vii. 14, etc.), and that where a cripple is described with a staff the expression is different (Exod. xxi. 19.) However, Gesenius, Ewald, Phillippson, Keil, and others render the word *crutch* or *staff*. Ancient Jewish writers regard this imprecation of David's as sinful.

Ver. 31. "**Before Abner.**" In the presence of his corpse. They were to take part in the funeral procession.

Ver. 33. "**A fool.**" A *nabal*, or worthless man.

Ver. 34. "**Thy hands were not bound.**" This means, either "Thou hadst not made thyself guilty of any crime, so as to die like a malefactor, in chains and bonds" (*Keil*), or, "with free hands, with which he might have defended himself; with free feet, with which he might have escaped from overpowering force. Without suspecting evil, he was attacked and murdered as a defenceless man." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 35. "**To eat meat.**" "It is uncertain whether David was to eat with the people (cf. chap. xii. 17), *i.e.*, to take part in the funeral meal that was held after the burial, or whether the people simply urged him to take some food for the purpose of soothing his own sorrow." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 38. "**A prince,**" etc. A prince by reason of his position—a great man because of his intellectual endowments.

Ver. 39. "**Weak, though anointed.**" Most commentators understand David to mean that he was too weak—too lately come into power—to be able to visit upon Joab and his brother the just reward of their crime, but Erdmann objects to this view—(1). Because it would have been very unwise to acknowledge his fear before such men; and (2). Because it would have been *untrue*, for he who had conquered Abner, and who had the people on his side, must have possessed the power to punish Joab. He understands the first adjective to signify *soft*, and *hard* to apply, not to the contrast between himself and the sons of Zeruiah as to *political* situation but as to *disposition*. While he, though a king, is absorbed in grief, they are unmoved and indifferent.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—21.

Abner's Revolt to David.

I. When the will of God and the will of men are contending, however long the struggle, the issue is not doubtful. In the preceding chapter we have the history of a contest in which the combatants were so equally matched that neither could conquer the other, but death claimed victory over both. This is not so very uncommon a case where there is an equality of resolution and resource and patience, and where neither side has any right to call in reinforcements from the God of right. But that episode in the warfare between Judah and Israel was not a type of the final issue of the struggle. It was the will of God that that struggle should be protracted for years, both to perfect the patience and faith of

David, and to show the men of Israel where their true interest lay. But even had the men of Judah been as inferior to their opponents in bravery and skill as they probably were in numbers—if every one of Ishbosheth's supporters had been an Abner and their number multiplied a thousandfold—it could have availed nothing in the long run, for they were fighting against the purpose and plan of God. This must be the issue of every contest of a like character. It may be good for the servants of God that the struggle be lengthened from years into centuries, but victory on the side of those who are on the side of God is only a question of time.

II. **Men who consult God's will in some acts of their life are sometimes strangely forgetful to do it in others.** We take it as certain that David consulted only his own desires or his own idea of what would conduce to his honour and prosperity when he multiplied the number of his wives, and even took one at least from outside his own nation. Although we have no reason to suppose he broke any express Divine command in so doing, yet it was evidently a violation of God's original intention, and an imitation of the customs of the heathen monarchs, and such an alliance with them was in direct opposition to that separation from them and their ways which is commanded by the law of Moses. If he had been as careful to inquire of the Lord concerning this matter as he was in others, how much domestic misery might he have escaped. But all good men omit sometimes to obey the command, "In *all* thy ways acknowledge Him," and, following their own inclination instead of hearkening to the voice of God, sow seeds of evil which afterwards yield them very bitter fruit. (On this subject see also on chap. i. 2.)

III. **A good deed done from a wrong motive is of no value to the doer.** By their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. vii. 16) is the word of Divine wisdom, and yet it is quite true, as F. W. Robertson remarks, that we must not always judge a man by his deeds, but the deeds by the man. The repentance which follows when a good man does wrong must be taken into account, and the motive that goes before when a bad man does right must be considered, before passing judgment. When Abner came over to David's side he was performing an act of tardy justice, but it was not the fruit of repentance. It was prompted by no desire to repair the wrong of the past, but by a determination to avenge an offence in the present. The same motive moved him to make friends with David as induced him to set Ishbosheth upon the throne, and, therefore, no more moral value can be attached to the one action than to the other. The declaration, "the Lord hath sworn to David" did not come from the lips of one who consulted the Divine will, but from one who made his own ambition his rule of life, and Abner only confesses his guilt when he utters it, because he makes it plain that he did not sin through ignorance.

IV. **Those who receive from others what they have no right to bestow will find punishment in being compelled to relinquish it.** Two men in this chapter are in this case. Ishbosheth received his crown, and Phaltiel his wife from men who were wronging others when they bestowed them, and the issue in both is what it must ever be under such circumstances. Every gift given by man which is not at the same time given by God is not bestowed upon its rightful owner, and will sooner or later be taken from the unlawful possessor to become the property of him to whom it belongs. However far and with whatever force a stone is thrown into the air, we feel that its return to the earth is certain. Whatever may be the height to which it ascends, we know there will come a moment when its return journey will begin, and its fall will be more rapid than its rise. So, however great may be the power and strength which is behind unjust promotion, and however long we may hold a gift which belongs to another, there is a law

above all others which can only be held at abeyance for a limited time, and when that limit has been reached the law will assert its dominion, and the work of restitution will often be as sudden as it is painful. Phaltiel must have known he was wronging David to take his wife, and Ishbosheth knew also that he had no right to the throne, but the one thought himself secure in the power of Saul, and the other trusted to the ability of Abner. The day of reckoning came for both, and they had both cause to bitterly regret they had accepted favours from men who had no right to bestow them.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. What grievous tales of distress are folded up in these brief words. Probably it was only irregular war, without much bloodshed; the war of skirmish and surprises, not of pitched battles or protracted sieges, or desperate assaults; but many a pillaged town and many a homestead laid in ashes, and many a heart crushed in despair or maddened to fury, and many a deep and deadly curse and fearful vow of vengeance would everywhere follow the track of war. And it was war of the most distressing and demoralising kind. —not foreign, but civil. Great national wars are usually attended by one counteracting benefit—they soften the keenness of private quarrels. But when parties in the same nation are fighting with each other, private quarrels, instead of being healed, are only exasperated in greater bitterness. In the painful war, therefore, in which David was engaged, he was deprived of the comfort of reflecting that whatever ravages it was producing abroad, it was drawing men's hearts closer to each other at home, and sweetening the breath of domestic society.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 8. In the variance of these two, we see there is no solid and constant friendship among the wicked, for that which is in God is only like unto Him, immutable and sure, and worthy of the name of amity, the other being more properly conspiracies.—*Guild.*

Ver. 13. In David's yielding and acceptation of Abner's offer we see that, albeit he hath a good cause, yet he neglects no occasion of secondary means offered, which is an example of imitation, for as men are said to contemn God who rely altogether upon seconds, so are they to be thought to tempt God, who altogether reject the use of lawful seconds.—*Guild.*

Ver. 16. From this occurrence it is clear that, among the wild briars of unsettled family relationships by which Israel was then overgrown, here and there also the flowers of a true genuine love and fidelity were to be met with. They bloomed, indeed, in the house of David, but their growth was not unhindered, and he did not remain untouched by the curse which the Lord had attached to the crime of polygamy in Israel.—*Krummacher.*

Ver. 18. Abner wins the heart of Israel, by showing God's charter for him whom he had so long opposed. Hypocrites make use of God for their own purposes, and care only to make Divine authority a colour for their own designs. No man ever heard Abner godly till now; neither had he been so at this time, if he had not intended a revengeful departure from Ishbosheth. Nothing is more odious than to make religion a stalking-horse to policy.—*Bishop Hall.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22—39.

The Murder of Abner.

I. Unprincipled men judge others by themselves. A man looking in a glass sees a reflection of himself—not perhaps of the man he ought to be or might have been, but exactly what he is. So a bad man is apt to think, when he looks

upon his brother, that he is but a reflection of himself in character, that his motives, and hopes, and intentions are the same as his own. Not being accustomed himself to act from principle, but in all things to put his own supposed interest in the foremost place, he thinks every other man must do the same. This was the way in which Joab regarded Abner and his conduct. He knew that if he were in Abner's place he should not hesitate to do what he now charged him with doing if he thought he should gain by it, and was, or pretended to be, far more suspicious of his honesty than David was. Or if he really believed that Abner was in earnest in his professions of loyalty to David, still judging him by his own standard, he looked forward to what would happen in the future. He knew that in the same circumstances he should endeavour to supplant all David's old servants, and never rest till he attained to the highest honour the king could bestow. That would involve a decrease of *his* power—a prospect his ambitious spirit could not brook. Hence his anger and his revenge.

II. In God's government of the world, one bad man is often the means of removing another. Neither God nor godlike creatures delight in destructive work—they love to build up rather than to destroy—to dispense reward rather than retribution. But as in the natural world the ground must be cleared of weeds if the corn is to have space to grow, so the power of evil men must be limited, and they sometimes removed from the earth, that the good may live and multiply. And this work of removal is often done by their own kind, and it is the only work for God that they can do. Wicked men cannot bring any positive blessing upon the world, but they can be used in this negative way to lessen the evil and make room for the work of the good. When the fire burns up the weeds and clears the ground for the sower, one destructive force in nature is used to destroy another, and when one bad man, in his self-seeking and passion, ends the career of another, he is the unconscious instrument in the hands of God of clearing the ground for the work of godly men. So was it with Joab in relation to Abner—both were godless, and consequently hindrances to the progress and happiness of the kingdom of God in Israel, and when one was permitted to fall by the sword of the other, one moral destroyer was used for the destruction of another that God's servant might find the place and do the work allotted to him.

III. Although one man is thus the retribution of God to another, the responsibility of the deed rests upon himself. Every human action must be judged, not by its consequences, but by its character. Men have sometimes murdered one whom they rightly judged to be an enemy of their country; but even if the belief was correct, neither it nor the good consequences arising from the deed affected its morality. The belief may be right and the consequences may be according to the belief, but the end can never justify the use of means which are contrary to the command of God. Still less can the results of such an act as that of Joab's justify the doer or lessen his guilt in the smallest degree. Joab was a murderer, although he was a sword of retribution in the hand of God. If he had slain Abner because he believed him to be a traitor to David and an enemy to God, the motives which actuated him could not have absolved him from blood-guiltiness. Still less can the fact of Abner's guilt justify a deed done purely from motives of revenge and jealousy, although that deed brought just punishment to a bad man. The fact that God overrules men's sin to further His purposes, does not do away with the sinfulness. (See also chapter iv.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Verses 28, 29. These words have often been regarded as an expression of exaggerated passion . . . but David here wishes nothing more than what the law predicts, and it can never be sinful to wish God to do what, in accordance with His will, He must do. The extension of the curse to the descendants clearly refers to the threatenings of the law; and in both cases the offensive character disappears, if we only remember that whoever by true repentance freed himself from connection with the guilt was also exempted from participation in the punishment.—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 38. This verse has been made the text of many sermons on the death of great men. We subjoin the outline of one. I. *A man has fallen.* I do not mean a mere male human individual, one whom the tailor rather than the mantua maker clothes,—a walking thing that wears a hat. I speak of that which God meant when He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Marred sadly now by the concussion of that fearful fall, but capable of restoration through the cross, and justifying well, in the renewal of its fair proportions and its countenance erect, the sacred record, "God has made man upright"—a man that has a mind and uses it—a man that has a heart and yields to it—a man that shapes his circumstances—a man that cares not for himself . . . a man to make occasions—a man to meet emergencies—a man to dare not only but to bear. . . . II. *A great man has fallen.* A great man first must be a man, and then must find or make the occasion to be great. In every man that *is* a man there is, potentially, a great man. . . . III. *A prince has fallen.* A prince in place. The head, as the word simply means, of twenty millions of free people, so constituted and declared by their own choice and act. A prince in rank . . . a prince in power . . . a prince in quiet dignity—a prince in calm indomitable resolution—a prince in utter disregard of consequences, when the right is seen and done. . . . "Know ye not"—who does not know, who does not feel, who does not own that it is so?—*Bishop Doane on the Death of President Taylor of the United States.* 1850.

Ver. 39. David was weak, not so much because Joab was strong, as because he himself shrank from doing what he knew to be right in the case. Had he put Joab to death, public opinion would have sustained him in the execution of justice; and even if it had not, he would have had the inward witness that he was doing his duty to the State. For a magistrate to be weak, is to be wicked. He is set to administer and execute the law without fear or favour; and whensoever he swerves from justice from either cause, he is a traitor at once to God and to the commonwealth. "Weak!" this is not to speak like a man, not to say a king.—*Taylor.*

It seems surprising that David, who was then in the flower of his age, and who had long been distinguished for his courage and skill as a military leader, should now decline into a subordinate position as a warrior, and that Joab should occupy the principal place in the wars of Israel and should exercise a dominant influence over David, so that the king was constrained to say this. . . . Was this unhappy condition a consequence of his polygamy? Was this multiplication of wives, contrary to God's command, a cause of effeminacy and softness? Did it disqualify him for the hardness of the field, and afford an opportunity for such bold, ambitious, and insidious persons as Joab, who profited by his weakness and favoured it, to gain a mastery over him? . . . If David had done what his conscience told him was right, and what he did to the murderers of Ishbosheth; if he had fully trusted God, and done justice with courage, according to God's law (Gen. ix. 6); relying on God,

and not looking to the carnal advantages he derived from the military skill of Joab and Abishai, he would probably have prevented other murders, such as that of Ishbosheth and Amasa; and he would have been spared the sorrow of giving on his deathbed the warrant of execution against Joab to be put in effect by Solomon. "Impunity invites to greater crimes." "He is cruel to the innocent who spares the guilty."—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**His hands were feeble,**" literally "**his hands slackened,**" *i.e.*, "he lost the power and courage to act as a king." (*Keil.*) "**Troubled,**" or "*confounded.*"

Ver. 2. "**Saul's son.**" "Noteworthy is this designation for Ishbosheth." (*Erdmann.*) "**Captains,**" etc. "The part that these two men play, as well as Abner's conduct, suggests the supposition that the firm military organisation that Saul had called into being had relaxed, and a disintegration of the army into separate bodies under adventurers and partisans was imminent, if it had not already occurred." (*Erdmann.*) "**Beeroth.**" Probably the present village of Bireh (Josh. ix. 17), about seven miles north of Jerusalem, and close to the western frontier of Benjamin.

Ver. 3. "**Fled to Gittain.**" Where this place was or why the Benjamites fled there is not known; some have suggested that the flight took place at the time of the Philistine invasion mentioned in 1 Sam. xxxi. 7. In Neh. xi. 33, a *Gittaim* is mentioned as being inhabited by Benjamites after the exile, but it may not be the same place.

Ver. 4. "**Mephibosheth,**" or *Meribaal* (Baal's fighter); see 1 Chron. viii. 34. His name was changed doubtless for the same reason as Eshbaal was changed to *Ishbosheth* (see on chap. ii. 8). This fact is here introduced to show that Ishbosheth was the last of Saul's family who could make any pretensions to the throne, as, according to Oriental notions, the physical infirmity of Mephibosheth unfitted him for the duties of sovereignty.

Ver. 5. "**On a bed,**" etc., literally *on the mid-day bed*, in a quiet, cool, retired part of the house, both the hour and the place favouring their deed of bloodshed.

Ver. 6. "**Fetched wheat.**" The grain for the supply of their soldiers was evidently kept in the house of the king. "It is still a custom in the East to allow the soldiers a certain quantity of corn, together with some pay." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 7. "As the thread of the narrative was broken by the explanatory remarks in ver. 6, it is resumed here by the repetition of some of the words. When Thenius, therefore, attempts to prove the 'evident corruption of the Masoretic text' by appealing to the *nonsense* of relating the murder of Ishbosheth, etc., twice over, he is altogether wrong, and has measured the peculiarities of Hebrew historians by the standard adopted by our own. J. P. F. Konigsfeldt has given the true explanation when he says:—'The Hebrews often repeat in this way for the purpose of relating something fresh, as for example in this instance, their carrying off the head.' Compare with this chap. iii. 22, 23, where the arrival of Joab is mentioned twice in two successive verses; or chap. v. 1–3, and many other passages." (*Kiel.*) "**The plain,**" *i.e.*, the Arabah, or Valley of the Jordan, as in chap. ii. 29.

Ver. 8. "**The king.**" Notice that David is always here so termed, while in respect to Ishbosheth the title is always avoided." (*Erdmann.*) "**Thine enemy, which sought,**" etc. These words *may* refer to Ishbosheth, but are generally understood in reference to Saul. Nothing is said in the history of any attempt of Ishbosheth to slay David. (See also on ver. 11.)

Ver. 11. "**How much more,**" etc. "The form of the thought is a progression from the less to the greater. If I executed in Ziklag him who avowed having killed at his own request on the battlefield mine enemy Saul, under whose persecutions the Lord delivered me from all adversity, how much more must I demand at your hands the blood of this *righteous* man whom ye murderously slew in his *house* on his *bed*." (*Erdmann.*) "**Righteous person.**" "The assumption of the regal power which Abner had forced upon Ishbosheth was not a capital crime in the existing state of things." (*Kiel.*) "**Require his blood.**" "On this phrase see Gen. ix. 5, according to which God is Himself the avenger of blood. (Comp. Psa. ix. 13.) David recognises himself as king in God's service, and as His instrument." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 12. "Cut off," etc. Because the hands and feet were the offending members. Such punishment is still common in Eastern countries. "The pool," etc. "Outside the town of Hebron is a pool of good water, which, being below the level of the adjoining ground, is accessible by flights of steps at each corner; and there is another reservoir at a little distance, both of which are very ancient. One or other of these must certainly be the pool referred to. The exposure of the mutilated relics at the pool was owing to its being a place of public resort." (*Jamieson.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

The Murder of Ishbosheth.

Thls chapter further illustrates the teaching of the preceding one, inasmuch as it—

I. Gives two examples of the unconscious co-operation of human actions and Divine purpose. The nurse of Mephibosheth obeyed a Divine instinct when she sought to save her charge from the danger which surrounded him. And she probably did save him from death at the hand of the Philistines, being so far permitted by God to succeed in her praiseworthy endeavour. Mephibosheth was spared to receive from David the tribute of gratitude which he deserved for his father's sake, but an apparent accident prevented the execution of the full intention. The child was saved, but saved to be a hopeless cripple for the rest of his days, and we can well imagine that his nurse felt long and deep grief in consequence. But most likely her fall was the means of preventing the son of Jonathan from coming into collision with his father's friend, and so bringing upon himself the fate which befel his uncle. To the miscarriage of the plans of man concerning him he probably owed the blessing of living a peaceful and honoured life instead of one of turmoil and disappointment. The event which to his friends seemed so untoward was an intervention of his father's God on his behalf, and a meeting and co-operation of the Divine and the human in a purpose of mercy towards him and towards the nation. For the lameness of Mephibosheth, as well as the death of Ishbosheth, was the removal of a hindrance to David's peaceful accession. The thoughts suggested by this latter event are the same as those upon the murder of Abner in the preceding chapter.

II. It shows the true standard by which to judge human actions. David, like the true man he was, looked at the deed of violence done to Ishbosheth not in the light of the relation in which it stood to himself, but in its relation to the eternal principles of right and wrong. As in the case of Saul (see page 276) he could separate the man from the opponent, and, as in the murder of Abner, he allowed no plausible excuse or plea to blind him to the real nature of the crime. On this subject see also page 289.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. *Cursed is the man that trusteth in men*, and maketh flesh his arm. 1. Because of the *frailty* of all human supports, with which fall the hopes based on them. 2. Because of the *faithlessness* of men, in whom blind confidence is placed instead of putting confidence in the faithfulness of the Lord. 3. Because of the *danger* and *ruin* of body and soul to which one thereby exposes himself.—*Lange's Commentary.*

The contrast is striking between the conduct of Ishbosheth under difficulty and that of David. In the history of David we have repeatedly found his faith faltering, and we have seen him overcome for the time by the spirit of distrust. But these occasions occurred in the midst of protracted and terrible struggles; they were exceptions to his usual bearing; faith commonly bore him up in his darkest trials. Ishbosheth, on

the other hand, had no resource—no sustaining power whatever under visible reverses. David's slips were like the temporary retiring of the gallant soldier, when, fagged and weary, he is driven back for a few moments by superior numbers; but as soon as he has recovered his breath, dashes on undaunted to the conflict. Ishbosheth's failure was like the conduct of the soldier who lays down his arms and rushes from the field as soon as he has begun to taste the bitter storm and cruel reverses of the war. With all his slips and failures, there was something in the demeanour of David that showed him to be cast in another mould from that of other men. He was habitually aiming at a higher standard, and upheld by the consciousness of a higher strength.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 8. *How evil seeks deceitfully to clothe itself with the appearance of good.* 1. By falsehood, in alleging something evil in others as a pretext to make itself appear right and good. 2. By *hypocrisy*, in representing itself as in harmony with God's word and will. 3. By the *pretence* of having promoted the interests of another. — *Lange's Commentary.*

How important it is that our conduct should be regulated by general laws, clearly and strictly defined—not dependent on the capricious judgment of each individual in his particular case, or loosely accommodated to particular circumstances. There seems to be no crime so flagrant but that some are found not only to commit it, under the influence of temptation, but to commit it without scruple or compunction, by contriving to persuade the conscience that theirs is a particular case.—*Lindsay.*

Ver. 11. Charity teaches us to make the best, not only of our friends, but of our enemies, and to think those may be righteous persons who yet in some instances do us wrong.—*Henry.*

Ver. 12. These rapid instantaneous executions by order of David have raised a painful feeling in pious hearts. Granting that the retribution was justly deserved, and granting that a rapid execution was necessary to make a due impression on the people, it may be asked—How could David, as a pious man, hurry sinners into the presence of their Judge without leaving them a moment to ask mercy, or giving them one affectionate exhortation to repentance? The question is one of very great difficulty, and with our present light it hardly admits of a satisfactory answer. The difficulty arises from our ignorance of the precise views which prevailed in Old Testament times in regard to the future world. It is certain that David and other pious men believed in a future life, and must often have thought about it; but how far they were ordinarily under the power of the world to come—how far, for example, the future life was present to their thoughts in connection with such men as Baanah and Rechab—is a problem which we have not materials to solve. The abrupt procedure of David on this and similar occasions favours the supposition that in their ordinary frames of mind, when not specially exercised in spiritual contemplation to the utmost stretch of their powers, they had a much less vivid impression of the future than we have now. . . . The Old Testament did not hide life and immortality from the view of faith, but it was the New Testament that brought them clearly to light.—*Blaikie.*

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Then, etc.** "The tenor of the history leads us to hold with Ewald that the recognition of David as king over all Israel occurred immediately after Ishbosheth's death, against Stäbelin, who thinks that there was an interval of several years after his death, during which all the tribes gradually came over to David." (*Erdmann.*) "**Thy bone,**" etc., *i.e.*, thy blood relations descended from one common ancestor. "The alliance of David with the Philistines had raised so painful a suspicion respecting his patriotic attachment to Israel, and his protracted residence within the Philistine territory had led to so widespread a belief that he had become a naturalised Philistine, as to have created powerful obstacles to the universal recognition of his claims to the throne. The people of Israel had, to a large extent, taken up this impression, and acted in opposition to him as a supposed alien. But time, as well as the tenor of David's administration in Judah, had dispelled their doubts and proved him to their satisfaction to be in heart and soul an Israelite." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 2. "**Leddest out,**" etc. Most expositors refer this to David's military leadership "**The Lord said**" (see on chap. iii. 17) "**feed,**" or, *shepherd, i.e.*, rule them. "This is the first time we find a governor described in Scripture as *pastor* of the people; afterwards the name is much used by the prophets, particularly Ezek. xxxiv. 23, and in many other places." (*Patrick.*) The designation is also used in Homer. "**Captain,**" rather *leader, prince.* "The first and third grounds answer exactly to the precept in Deut. xvii. 15, 'Thou shalt make him king over thee *whom the Lord thy God shall choose*;' out of the midst of *thy brethren* shalt thou make a king over thee." (*Erdmann.*) "**A league,**" etc. "The relation of both parties to the Lord is indicated by the phrase '*before the Lord.*'" (*Erdmann.*) "There was probably gradually established among king and people some recognition of mutual rights and duties—an unwritten, or, possibly in part, a written law. This would not be out of harmony with the theocratic conception of the government. Philippson points out some apparent indications (as 1 Kings xii.) of such a law." (*Transr. of Lange's Commentary.*) See also notes on 1 Sam. x. 25. "**They anointed David.**" "To which the chronicler adds (1 Chr. xi. 3) 'according to the word of the Lord by Samuel,' an explanatory addition referring to the Lord's command to Samuel to anoint David king over Israel. David's anointing by Samuel is now confirmed by the anointing of the people, they having expressly and solemnly recognised his Divine call to be king over Israel." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 4. "**Thirty years old.**" "The age of David shows that the events related from 1 Sam. xiii. to the end of the book did not occupy above ten years—four years in Saul's service, four years of wandering, one year and four months among the Philistines, and a few months after Saul's death." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 6. "**Went to Jerusalem.**" "That this took place immediately after the anointing of David as king of Israel is apparent not only from the fact that the account follows directly afterwards, but also from the circumstance that, according to verse 5, David reigned in Jerusalem just as many years as he was king over all Israel." (*Keil.*) "Whether David was directed by the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, or whether he was left solely to his own judgment regarding it, we cannot but admire the wisdom of the arrangement he made in the choice of Jerusalem in contrast to the shortsighted policy of Saul in reference to the same matter. The son of Kish set up his court in his native town of Gibeah—a place of no intrinsic importance—and bearing reproach among the people as having been the scene of one of the foulest outrages ever committed in the land. Moreover, it was within the territory of his own tribe of Benjamin, and his preference for it was apt to provoke the jealousy of the others. David, however, proceeded upon other and more statesmanlike principles. He would not continue in Hebron. No doubt that city was equally sacred to all the people, from its connection with their common father Abraham, but it had been recognised as the special capital of Judah; and if David had remained in it, some overzealous partisan of Judah might have said that the other tribes had been merely annexed to or absorbed in the little kingdom which for seven years and a half had its seat of government there. Hence, just as in our own times Victor Emanuel, when he was called to the throne of a united Italy, removed his capital first from Turin to Florence, and afterward from Florence to Rome, feeling that it was due to the other portions of his people that he should be no longer a mere Sardinian or Tuscan prince, so David wisely considered that a regard to the feelings of the other tribes demanded that some other city than Hebron should be chosen as the metropolis. But in determining what place should be selected, many difficulties would present themselves. Bethlehem, though dearer to him than all other cities, could not be thought of; and if he had gone into the territory of any other tribe than his own he might have been liable to the imputation of partiality, and might have provoked jealousy throughout eleven-twelfths of his dominions. In these circumstances the easiest solution of the difficulty would be to get hold of some place of requisite strength and importance not presently identified with any of the tribes, and in the acquirement of which all of them might have a share. Such a place was the fortress of Zion, held by the tribe of the Jebusites, whom, up to this time, no army

had been able to dislodge. It was situated at the extreme verge of the territory of Judah, where it abutted on that of Benjamin, and belonged, properly speaking, to neither. *(Taylor.)* "The Jebusites." "These belonged to the great Canaanitish race (Gen. x. 6) who dwelt, when the Israelites took possession of Palestine, in the mountain district of Judah. (Comp. Numb. xiii. 30, Josh. xi. 3.) Neither Joshua who conquered them in a battle (Josh. xi. 3 *sq.*), nor the children of Judah, who only got possession of the lower city (Judges i. 8; comp. Josephus Ant. V. 2. 2), nor the Benjamites, to whom the city had been assigned (Josh. xviii. 28) could conquer the strong citadel of Jebus on Mount Zion." (*Erdmann.*) "The blind and the lame." It is impossible to decide with certainty to what or to whom this expression refers. Some, including several Jewish expositors, and Luther, regard it as describing the idols of the Jebusites, which they had placed upon their battlements, and upon which they relied for defence, and whom they knew the Israelites regarded with scorn. (See Psa. cxv. 4 *sq.*) The most probable interpretation seems to be that the Jebusites felt so secure in their citadel, shut in as it was by deep valleys on three sides, that they taunted the men of Israel with the assurance that blind and lame men would suffice to keep them out. Keil and most modern scholars thus interpret it. Wordsworth, however, objects to it on the ground that if the reference was to such persons they would have been *pitied*, and not *hated* (see ver. 8) by David.

Ver. 7. "The stronghold of Zion." There is great difference of opinion as to which height was originally known as Mount Zion. It is certain that from the time of Constantine the name has been given to the western hill, on which has always stood the city of Jerusalem, but Mr. Fergusson, in his article on *Jerusalem* in the *Biblical Dictionary*, produces a mass of evidence in favour of identifying the ancient Mount Zion with the eastern hill (now called Mount Moriah), upon which the Temple was built, and to which he says it is certain the name was exclusively applied up to the time of the destruction of the city by Titus. He adduces in proof the words of Psa. xxviii. 2, and other passages, in which Zion is spoken of as a holy place in such terms as are never applied to Jerusalem (Psa. ii. 6, cxxxii. 13, Joel iii. 27, etc.), and others in which he thinks Zion is spoken of as a separate city from Jerusalem. (Psa. li. 18, Zech. i. 17, etc.) "The Rabbis," he adds, "with one accord place the Temple on Mount Zion," and contends that the transference of the name Zion from the western to the eastern hill solves all the difficulties which have hitherto surrounded the identification of many sites mentioned in Sacred History.

Ver. 8. "The gutter." The *cataract* or *waterfall*. (So *Keil* and *Erdmann.*) Some understand simply a declivity; but the first rendering agrees with the meaning which must be given to the Hebrew word in Psalm xliii. 8, which is the only other place in which it occurs. "Hated," etc. This clause may be rendered *who hate*, but the other rendering is the more probable. Erdmann remarks, "Both these admissible renderings point to the fact that the Israelites had to maintain a furious, embittered combat with the enemy." But the entire passage is very obscure, and has received various interpretations. "Wherefore they said" is generally taken to mean that these classes were excluded from the Temple, but for that assertion we have no proof, and it is hard to see what this proverb could have to do with the Temple, which was not at that time in existence. The true explanation seems to be, "The blind and the lame are there—let him enter the place if he can:" a proverb which came to be current with regard to any fortress that was reputed to be impregnable. *(Taylor.)*

Ver. 9. "So David dwelt," literally, *sat down*. Whichever eminence is here referred to, this was the foundation of that city which was to become the most memorable in the history of the world. "Those only," says Dean Stanley, "who reflect on what Jerusalem has since been to the world can appreciate the grandeur of the moment when it passed from the hands of the Jebusites, and became 'the city of David.'" Its situation is in keeping with its history, and is thus described by Dean Stanley. "The situation of Jerusalem is in several respects singular among the cities of Palestine. Its elevation is remarkable, not from its being on the summit of one of the numerous hills of Judea, like most of the towns and villages, but because it is on the edge of one of the highest table-lands of the country. . . . . From the south, the approach is by a slight descent (Hebron being higher still), but from every other side the ascent is perpetual; and, to the traveller approaching Jerusalem from the west or east, it must always have presented the appearance . . . beyond any important city that has ever existed on the earth, of a mountain city; breathing, as compared with the sultry plains of the Jordan or of the coast, a mountain air; enthroned, as compared with Jericho or Damascus, Gaza or Tyre, on a mountain fastness. In this respect it concentrated in itself the character of the whole country of which it was to be the capital—the "mountain throne"—the "mountain sanctuary" of God. . . . Again, Jerusalem was on the ridge, the broadest and most strongly marked ridge of the backbone of the complicated hills which extend through the whole country from the desert to the plain of Esdraelon. Every wanderer, every conqueror, every traveller who has trod the central route of Palestine from north to south must have passed through the table-land of Jerusalem. . . . Abraham, as he journeyed from Bethel to Hebron—Jacob, as he wandered on his lonely exile from Beersheba to Bethel; . . . Joshua, as he forced his way from Jericho, and met the kings in battle at Gibeon; the Philistines, as they

came up from the maritime plain and pitched in Michmash; no less than Pompey, when in later times he came up from the valley of the Jordan, or the Crusaders when they came from Tyre with the express purpose of attacking Jerusalem—must all have crossed the territory of Jebus." Ancient writers thought Jerusalem to be so much in the midst of the then known world that they called it literally "the navel of the earth." "In reference," says Dr. Jamieson, "to the actual circumstances and after history of the Jews, Jerusalem was, of all sites in the country, the best that could be chosen; and yet on its mountain height, far away from the roads between the great empires, and accessible only by steep and winding passes, it was secluded, so that it was freed, as it now is, from any necessary implication in the great movements of the world. So secluded, and yet so central, it was marvellously fitted as the scene of the events that were to be transacted in it. "**Millo**," or "the filling." "At any rate some kind of fortification, probably a large tower or castle. The name probably originated in the fact that through this tower or castle the fortification of the city, or the surrounding wall, was *filled* or completed. It was probably a well-known fortress erected by the Jebusites." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 11. "**Hiram.**" From 2 Chron. ii. 2, and 1 Kings v. 15, it seems clear that this is the same man who was afterwards Solomon's ally. Hence some have supposed that this embassy was not sent until a long time after the conquest of Zion, and that the arrangement of the events in this chapter is "topical rather than strictly chronological." (*Keil.*) As Hiram was still reigning twenty years after the erection of the temple (1 Kings ix. 10), Keil places this embassy from six to ten years after David's accession to the sovereignty of the entire kingdom. "**Cedar trees.**" The eastern part of Lebanon (Antilibanus), which belonged to Israel, did not produce cedar trees; but the north-western range, belonging to Phenicia, was then covered with cedar forests.

Ver. 13. "**Out of,**" etc. *In* Jerusalem, as in 1 Chron. xiv.

Ver. 14. "**Shammuah,**" etc. These are the sons of Bathsheba, although there is a slight difference in the termination of two of the names in 1 Chron. iii. 5.

Vers. 15 and 16. There are seven names here and nine in 1 Chron. iii. Keil suggests that the two first-named, Eliphat and Nogah, died in infancy, and that two younger children received the same names.

Ver. 17. "**To the hold.**" Keil and others understand this to refer to some mountain fortress outside the citadel of Zion, and Keil further contends that this event must have therefore taken place before the Jebusites were driven out, as it is most unlikely David would have quitted the fortification to attack the enemy. Erdmann considers that it refers to the citadel itself, and thinks the expression "*went down*" is not against this view, for, "though the citadel was so high than one ascended from it on all sides, yet its plateau was by no means a horizontal plain, but was made up of higher and lower parts, and David of course made his residence upon the highest and safest part, the most favourable position for a military outlook, while the fortifications must have necessarily lain upon the relatively lower *north-western* side, and with this agrees the fact that the Philistines advanced to the attack from the *west*." Maurer remarks, "David was not yet certain whether to defend himself at the walls, or to advance to meet the enemy."

Ver. 18. "**Valley of Rephaim.**" Many writers identify this locality with a fruitful plain nearly three miles long by two wide, lying to the south-west of Jerusalem, and only separated from the valley of Hinnom by a narrow ridge of land. But Mr. Grove (*Bib. Dictionary*) contends that it does not answer to the description of the Hebrew word, which always designates an enclosed valley. It was the scene of some of David's most remarkable adventures, It doubtless derived its name from the ancient *Rephaim*, or *giants*. (Josh. xv. 8, etc.)

Ver. 20. "**Baal-perazim.**" The place of *breaches*, or *bursts*. (See ver. 20.) "There may have been previously a sanctuary of Baal on this spot." (*Bib. Dict.*)

Ver. 21. "**Images.**" Probably small tutelary deities which they brought with them into the field for protection.

Ver. 23. "**Mulberry trees.**" "**Baca-shrubs.**" From baca, to *weep*. Hence either some drooping tree like the weeping willow, or one which sheds gum like the balsam. The Arabs now give the name to a tree of the latter kind, from which, if a leaf is broken off, there flows sap like a white tear.

Ver 24. "**The sound of a going.**" As if an army was advancing. "The word signifies a majestic stately tread or stepping, often used of God. (Psa. lxviii. 7.) (*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 25. "**Geba.**" Probably Gibeah of Saul or of Benjamin, a city to the north of Benjamin, the present *Jeba*. "**Gazer,**" or Gezer, at the extreme north of the Philistine country.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-5.

DAVID CHOSEN KING OVER ALL ISRAEL.

I. Those who prove their right to rule by their conduct will in due time find subjects to maintain their sovereignty. The divine right of kings must be sought and found in what men are and in what they have done or can do. Those who claim to be leaders and rulers of men claim to be God's vicegerents, and as such must produce their credentials—proofs of intellectual and moral worth. If no man can represent a human monarch without credentials, much more are they to be demanded when a man assumes the headship of a nation or a community and claims authority over it in the name of the King of kings. And those of character and ability are the only ones that will be accepted in the long run, and none but these will command an allegiance worth having. David had to wait long before the whole nation recognised his right to reign, but in all these years of waiting he was adding to his credentials, and by a series of brave and righteous deeds was increasing the strength of his claim to the throne until it became irresistible, and the whole nation was forced to acknowledge that he whom God had chosen to shepherd it was fully worthy of the high honour to which he was called. So it has ever been and will be. Although no prophet is sent to anoint the head of him whom God now calls to similar service, yet every divinely appointed king of men, possessing as he does these qualifications to rule, will in due time be placed upon a throne by willing subjects.

II. The special qualifications demanded by God in a king or ruler. God expresses His idea of the relationship of a king to His people by the use of the word shepherd, and thus entirely removes the office from that of the despot who uses his people for his own selfish ends instead of using his life for their welfare. We learn from the words of Jacob, in Gen. xl. 34 sq., what were the duties of an Eastern shepherd, and how stern was the life he led—how far removed his lot was from one of indolence and self-indulgence. This is the symbol which the Divine King uses when speaking of David, and repeats constantly in the Old Testament writings to show what He demands from those whom He calls to rule. Such a call does not mean exemption from care and toil, but a large increase of such burdens. In His eyes the honour is not in being served, but in rendering service, and the larger sphere and the more elevated position involve heavier duties and larger qualifications. Shepherds of men are expected to be willing to follow the example of the Great Shepherd, who proved Himself the true King of men by giving Himself for the flock. And for this work a *special knowledge* is also needed. As a man must be possessed of some special knowledge to be a successful shepherd, so a ruler of men must be possessed of special knowledge. Christ is the pre-eminent ruler of men because He *knows* them—because He needs not that any should "testify of any man" whom He is shepherding. (John ii. 25, x. 14). And it behoves him who is called by God to be an under-shepherd to make men in general—and especially those under his care—the objects of his thoughtful study, that he may become acquainted with their dispositions and needs. To do this he must have also a *loving sympathy* with them. We are none of us strangers to the feeling of regard which often springs up in men towards animals dependent on them, and therefore we can imagine that a faithful shepherd has some affection for his sheep. This is indispensable in *human* shepherds, for to *love* men is to *understand* them, and to love them is to be willing to suffer for them, and will beget love in return in any men worthy of the name. The Great Shepherd had as much love for men as He had knowledge of them, and therefore "*all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him.*" (Psa. lxxii. 11). Every elevation in life brings with the honour a due proportion of increased duties and responsibilities, and such an exaltation as that which David experienced was heavily weighted with them.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 5. During all this time he was sedulously engaged in completing the discipline of the rough men who had shared his desert fortunes, and preparing them for the higher service on which they were afterwards to enter. Can we imagine a position better adapted for this purpose? For was it not the most sacred place in the whole country? Was it not on that very ground . . . that for more than two centuries their ancestors had guarded their high deposit, maintained the divine testimony, and manifested the divine order of human life? Did not the treasured sepulchre there, upon that hill, which was already ancient and worn, with the passing of eleven centuries over its covered surface, contain their dust? —*Drew.*

Not all at once did David pass from the shepherd life of Bethlehem to the throne of Jerusalem. There was a long, and weary, and trying road to be traversed by him after his anointing by Samuel, before he reached the lofty elevation for which he was designated and consecrated by the prophet's oil. He was not cradled in luxury, nor dandled in affluence, but his character was hardened by trial, and his judgment was matured by frequently recurring emergency. From the very first, indeed, he was "prudent in matters," but such a history as his could not but stimulate and sharpen his natural abilities. His military genius, which was destined yet to show itself on many a glorious field as he extended his dominion "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the land," had been quickened and developed by his experiences in the long war with the house of Saul; and his knowledge of human nature, an acquirement so needful for one who was to be a ruler of men, had been increased by his dealing with his followers in the hold, and with his enemies in diplomacy; while, best of all, his confidence in God had been strengthened by his manifold trials, in and through which he had been sustained by the divine grace, and out of which he had been delivered by the divine hand. But it is not different yet. Success is not usually a sudden thing, or, if it be so, it is not a wholesome thing. Generally speaking, it is a matter of time, and trial, and diligence, and study. The heat of the conservatory, which brings the flower rapidly to maturity, does also nurse it into weakness, so that its beauty is only short-lived; but the plant that grows in the open air is strengthened while it grows, and is able to withstand even the biting winter's cold. Resistance is necessary to the development of power; and the greatest misfortune that can befall a youth is to have no difficulties whatever with which to contend. It is by overmastering obstacles that a man's character is mainly made. Hence, let no one be discouraged who is called in early life to struggle with adversity. He is thereby only making himself for his future life-work. Not in a day, nor in a year, nor in many years, do we reach the throne of our individual power, the sphere of our personal and peculiar labour. We graduate up to it through trial, and each new difficulty surmounted is not only a new step in the ladder upward, but also a new qualification for the work that is before us. . . . . .

Nor does this principle hold merely of the early part of our earthly life as related to the later. It will be illustrated also in our earthly life as connected with a heavenly. If we be Christ's, it is no doubt true that He is preparing a place for each of us; but it is just as true that, through the discipline of our daily difficulties, he is preparing each of us for our own particular place; and the characters we are forming here will find their appropriate employment and development in the work which in heaven will be assigned to us. . . . Thus by the leverage of this principle we lift our earthly lives up to the very level of heaven itself; and every experience we are passing through now becomes a preparation for our eternal royalty at Christ's right hand.—*Taylor.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6-25.

THE CONQUEST OF JERUSALEM AND THE DEFEAT OF THE PHILISTINE.

I. **Man's true security and strength lies not in his possession of the seen, but in his relation to the unseen.** When David and his men advanced upon the fortified city of Jerusalem, all appearances were against them and for the Jebusites. To the eye of sense it seemed impossible that this hitherto impregnable fort should yield to the attack of any army. When we remember what it cost the legions of Rome to reduce it by siege, we can form some idea how altogether unlikely it appeared that such a force as that which David led could carry it by assault. If there had been no agencies at work beyond those which appealed to the eye of sense, we can well believe that the boast of the Jebusites would have been justified by the result. But a power was with the men of Israel of which the dwellers in Jerusalem took no account. The God of battles was on the side of the former, and He had decreed that for purposes of mercy to the world at large, the stronghold of Zion should become the city of David. It was not gained by him by strength of arm or skill in warfare, but given to him as a servant of the Lord God of Hosts. And when he was established there he dwelt securely, not by reason of the towers and walls which he built round about, but because the same God established and exalted him for His people's sake. But though we read that David perceived this truth (verse 12), is there not reason to fear that his trust in the unseen and real was far from perfect and undivided? In the multiplication of wives and concubines, after the manner of the heathen nations, there seems to be a reaching out after some apparent but unreal sources of strength, which afterwards proved themselves to be indeed elements of insecurity and weakness. Assuming that his action in this matter must have been prompted in great measure by political motives, and remembering the disastrous consequences which followed, we learn how fatal is any attempt to look for success and security anywhere but in the service of God.

II. **The enemies of God's kingdom on the earth are undaunted and persevering in the face of continued defeats.** The conquest of the Jebusites, although so striking and complete, did not prevent the Philistine host from seeking David, and the entire rout of their army at Baal-perazim did not discourarge them from coming up yet again. In the struggle that is ever waging between the Church of God and her foes, the servants of God have ever found their enemies as undaunted by reverses as were these people by the previous successes of David. It might have been thought that his name, associated as it had so often been with such signal disaster to this nation, would have ensured to him exemption from their attacks, but this was so far from being the case that they hesitated not to attack him even now when his position was stronger and his followers more numerous than ever. The courage and pertinacity of these Philistines were worthy of a better cause, and the same may be said of many a host since which has arrayed itself against the Lord and against His anointed. The history of the world plainly teaches us that it is not only those who fight for God and right who can persevere in the face of defeats, for their opponents have often proved to be equal to them in this respect. It behoves them to see to it that they never surpass them.

III. **Those who follow God's commands will have Him go before with needful help.** In both the instances before us, David, as was his custom, asked guidance from above. By this act he acknowledged that he did not *trust in his bow*, and that he knew his *sword could not save him* (Psa. xl. 6), and that he went forth now, as in the days of his youth (1 Sam. xvii. 45), only as the servant

of the Lord God of Israel. And the result of this reverent waiting upon God for direction was what it always was and ever will be. God never commands His people to go where He will not go before them, and never sends them to battle for Him at their own charges. But while they see to it that they keep close to the Divine directions and patiently fulfil the conditions imposed by Divine wisdom, they must be energetic in doing their part, and "bestir" (ver. 24) themselves to make use of the intervention of God on their behalf.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 9. The establishment of David's capital . . . illustrates the principles upon which his kingdom stood, and shows wherein it differed from the great Asiatic empires which were contemporary with it. The first sign of the unity of *these* monarchies was the building of some great city . . . the inhabitants felt they were a people because they were encompassed with walls . . . The commonwealth of Israel began in open plains and pastures. A single man, who had not a foot of earth for his possession, was its founder. . . Only after centuries of conflicts, discomfitures, humiliations, they acquired a king, and a city which he could make the centre of their tribes . . . . Here are the two kinds of civilisation; the civic life is in one the beginning, in the other the result of a long process. But in the first you have a despotism which becomes more expansive and oppressive from day to day . . . in the other sometimes a weary struggle, but it is the struggle of spirits, a struggle for life. And God Himself is helping that struggle . . . and bringing out of confusion a real, at last even something of a visible and outward unity.—*Maurice.*

Ver. 12. This language, some may think, would have been more suitable and pious if an extraordinary, evidently miraculous, event had raised David to the throne of Israel. Such an event might have enabled him to perceive that he was divinely elected to reign; he might have continued to reign with the same comfortable assurance. But he appears to have risen quite as slowly—under the same course of accidents—as other leaders. . . . What man who has not taken some very outrageous method of establishing his power, might not say that the Lord had bestowed his dominion upon him, if that phrase became the lips of the shepherd sovereign? This is a question which I am not able to answer. I do not know what king might not safely adopt these words and ought not to adopt them. The danger, I fancy, is in the idle use of them when no definite meaning is attached to them. So far from admitting that David would have had more right to think and speak as he did, if the angel suddenly appearing had placed the crown upon his head, I apprehend that the strength and liveliness of his conviction arose from . . . the successiveness, the continuity, of the steps in his history, which assured him that God's hand had been directing the whole. One startling event . . . he might have referred to chance, or to the rare irregular interference of an omnipotent Being. Only such a Being as the Lord God of Abraham . . . could have woven the web of his destinies. . . . The two clauses of the sentence are inseparably connected. A government which a man wins for himself he uses for himself. That which he inwardly and practically acknowledges as conferred upon him by a righteous Being cannot be intended for himself. . . . The deepest lesson which David had learnt was that he himself was under government; that in his heart and will was the inmost circle of that authority which the winds and the sea, the moon and the stars, obeyed. . . . To understand that the empire over wills and hearts is the highest which man can exercise, because it is

the highest which God exercises; to understand that his empire cannot be one of rough compulsion, because God's is not of that kind; to understand that the necessity for stern, quick, inevitable punishment, arises from the unwillingness of men to abide under a yoke of grace and gentleness; to understand that the law looks terrible and overwhelming to the wrong-doer, just because he has shaken off his relation to the Person from whom law issues, in whom dwells all humanity and sympathy, all forgiveness and reclaiming mercy—this was the highest privilege of a Jewish king, that upon which the rightful exercise of all his functions depended.—*Maurice.*

Vers. 23, 24. *The rustling of the Lord's approaching help* in the tops of the trees. 1. Dost thou wait for it at His bidding? 2. Dost thou hear it with the right heed? 3. Dost thou understand it in the right sense? 4. Dost thou follow it without delay?—*Lange's Commentary.*

These words are important for *us* also, in a figurative sense, in our warfare with the children of unbelief in this world. They teach us that in our own strength, and merely with the human weapons of reason and science, we are not to make war against the adversary. Success can only be calculated upon when the conflict is undertaken under the *influence* of the Holy Spirit of God, breathed forth and in the immediate blessed experience of the gracious presence of the Lord, and of the truth of his Word. Then there breaks forth from our hearts that which we call "*testimony;*"—a speaking from the present enjoyment of salvation; a speaking arising from a comprehensive, vital, powerful conception of the infallibility of that for which the undertaking has been begun; a speaking of the whole animated personality. This breaks through the enemy. No bulwark of science falsely so called withstands this.—*Krummacher.*

Verses 22-25. We cannot but be struck, in this narrative, with the humble piety of David in asking guidance from the Lord, and with his willingness implicitly to obey the commands which he received. Nor can we fail to observe the clear and explicit nature of the answers which he received from the Urim and Thummim. The ancient heathens had their oracles in connection with the temples in which they worshipped their divinities; but the responses given at these places to those who consulted them were generally expressed so ambiguously that no great guidance was given by them, and they could not be falsified by any event. . . . . But here, in the replies given by the sacred breastplate, there is no obscurity. Everything is definite and clear, and David could have no hesitation as to his duty in each case. Of course, there is not now any such means of obtaining the unerring guidance of God as David then enjoyed, in so far as the contingencies of our daily lives are concerned; but still, in answer to prayer, God will lead us in the right way, provided only we unfeignedly commit ourselves to Him, and willingly accept His direction step by step. Here is the warrant on which every one of us is entitled to proceed: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and and it shall be given him." Let us, therefore, use the Bible and the throne of grace as David employed the Urim and Thummim, and we may depend upon it that, even as "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees" indicated to him when he was to advance, there will be something, either within ourselves or in the arrangement of God's providence external to us, which will guide us.—*Taylor.*

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Verse 1. "**Chosen Men.**" Keil understands this assembly to have been composed of representatives of the ntire nation, but the use of the word *again* seems to point to a military gathering. Thenius remarks that we learn from this "that David already in a certain sense maintained a standing army."

Ver. 2. "**All the people,**" etc. "These are not the above-named thirty thousand warriors, but besides them, the representatives of the whole nation gathered to the festival as described in 1 Chron. xiii. 1-16, where nothing is said of a military body; while here in our passage the preliminary conference with the heads of families is passed over, and only a summary statement made as to the accompaniment of the ark by the people." *(Erdmann.)* "**Baale of Judah.**" From 1 Chron. xiii. 6, we know that this was Kirjath-jearim where the ark was carried before the death of Samuel. It still retained its ancient Canaanitish name (Josh. xv. 9, 60) in conjunction with the one given by the Israelites. "It lay on the border between Judah and Benjamin, westward on the border of the latter tribe and about eight miles west of Jerusalem." *(Erdmann.)* "**Whose name,**" etc. The rendering of this phrase is difficult; it is probably "*over which, or upon which, the Name is called (or invoked) the Name of Jehovah*, etc. "The name of God denotes all the operations of God through which He attests His personal presence in that relation into which he has entered to man, *i.e.*, the whole of His divine self-manifestation, or of that side of the divine nature which is turned towards men."—(*Herzog.*)

Ver. 3. "**A new cart.**" This mode of conveyance was in direct opposition to the Divine requirement (Numb. vii. 9), and was probably borrowed from a custom of the Philistines and others, who are supposed to have had sacred carts on which to carry about their gods. "**Abinadab.**" The ark had been standing in the house of Abinadab from the time when the Philistines sent it back into the land of Israel, *i.e.*, about seventy years, viz., twenty to the victory of Ebenezer (1 Sam. vii.), forty years under Samuel and Saul, and about ten years under David. The further statement that Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, drove the cart may easily be reconciled with this. These two sons were either born about the time when the ark was taken to Abinadab's house, or at a subsequent period; or else the term *sons* is used, as is frequently the case, in the sense of grandsons. (*Keil* and others.) "**Gibeah,**" rather, *the hill.*

Ver. 4. "**Accompanying the ark.**" Literally, *with* the ark. This sentence not fitting the sense, most critics suppose a copyist's error, and omit either the whole of ver. 4, or the first clause of it.

Ver. 5. "**Played.**" Literally, *were sporting, i.e.*, dancing to vocal and instrumental music. "**All manner of instruments,**" etc. Literally, with all manner of cypress-woods, which makes no sense, hence many critics adopt the reading of the Septuagint, "*with might and with songs,*" as in 1 Chron. xiii. 8. "**Harps**" (*kinnor*). A stringed instrument, which apparently more resembled the guitar than our modern harp, since it was played on in walking. "**Psalteries**" (*nebel*). (See 1 Sam. x. 5.) "**Timbrel**" (*toph*). A species of hand-drum or tambourine. "**Cornet**" (*menana*). An instrument which consisted of two rods fastened together at one end, upon which rings were hung which made a tinkling sound when shaken.

Ver. 6. "**Nachon's threshing floor.**" Nachon is not a proper name. Erdmann translates "*a fixed threshing floor,*" *i.e.*, "one which did not change its place like a summer floor (Dan. ii. 35), and therefore probably had a roof." Keil and others read "the *threshing floor of smiting*, or *of the stroke*, conjecturing that it was so called from the incident which took place there. "**Shook it.**" rather, *stumbled*, thereby making it likely that the cart would be overturned.

Ver. 7. "**Error.**" "None could so much as look at the ark, much less touch it (Numb. iv. 15, 16, 20), without peril of life."

Ver. 8. "**Displeased.**" "The word denotes angry excitement." *(Erdmann.)* On further reflection, David could not fail to discover where the cause of Uzzah's offence, which he had atoned for with his life, really had lain, and that it had actually arisen from the fact that he, (David) and those about him had decided to disregard the distinct instructions of the law with regard to the handling of the ark." *(Keil.)* "**Perez-uzzah,**" or the *rent* or *breach* of Uzzah. The situation of this place is unknown, but Josephus says that it retained its name in his day.

Ver. 9. "**Afraid.**" "David's excitement at what had occurred was soon changed into fear of the Lord." *(Keil.)* "**Obededom the Gittite.**" A Levite of the family of the Korahites, who descended from Kohath (comp. Exod. vi. 16, 18, 21, with 1 Chron. xxvi. 4); he was therefore one of the family whose special duty it was to bear the ark. He is generally supposed to have been called the *Gittite* from his birthplace, the Levitical city of Gathrimmon, in the tribe of Dan (Josh. xix. 45). The name of this man is literally *serving*, or *servant of, Edom.* "It may be surmised that he, or some ancestor of his, had once been in servitude to the Edomites." (*Transl. of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 13. **"They that bare."** This shows that the Divine requirements were now strictly complied with. (See 1 Chron. xv. 11-15.) **"Six paces."** This is sometimes understood to mean that a fresh sacrifice was offered at every six paces, but there is nothing in the text to favour such an assumption—the plain statement is that as soon as the bearers had advanced the first six paces, the offerings took place. (So Keil, Erdmann, and others.)

Ver. 14. **"David danced."** "As emotions of joy or sorrow express themselves in movements or gestures of the body, efforts have been made among all nations, but especially among those of the south and east, in proportion as they seem more demonstrative, to reduce to measure and to strengthen by unison the more pleasurable—those of joy. The dance is spoken of in holy Scripture universally as symbolical of rejoicing . . . and in the earlier period is found combined with some song or *refrain* (Exod. xv. 20, etc.) . . . more especially in those outbursts of popular feeling which cannot find vent in voice or gesture singly. Nor is there any more strongly popular element traceable in the religion of the ancient Jews than the opportunity so given to a prophet or prophetess to enkindle enthusiasm . . . more especially among the women, themselves most easily stirred and most capable of exciting others. The dance was regarded even by the Romans as the worship of the body . . . and Plato certainly reckons dancing as part of gymnastics. So far was the feeling of the purest period of antiquity from attaching the notion of effeminacy to dancing that the ideas of this and of warlike exercises are mutually interwoven." (*Smith's Biblical Dictionary.*) **"A linen ephod."** "The white ephod was, strictly speaking, a priestly costume, although in the law it is not prescribed as the dress to be worn by them when performing their official duties, but rather as the dress which denoted the priestly character of the wearer (see at 1 Sam. xxii. 18); and for this reason it was worn by David in connection with these festivities as the head of the priestly nation of Israel." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 16. **"Michal"** etc. As has been remarked on verse 14, the women of the Jewish nation, and especially those nearly related to the heroes of the occasion, were accustomed to take the most prominent part in the demonstration (Exod. xv. 20, Judges xi. 34), hence Michal should herself have led the female choir and have come out to meet David and the ark, and her absence shows, in a very marked manner, her want of religious sympathy. Keil remarks that "in David she only loved the brave hero and exalted king," not the servant of God.

Ver. 17. **"In his place,"** etc. "That is, in the space marked off according to the tabernacle which still stood in Gibeon, in the *Holy of Holies.*" (*Erdmann.*) "Why did not David remove the mosaic tabernacle to Mount Zion at the same time as the ark of the covenant and so restore the divinely-established sanctuary in its integrity? This question can only be answered by conjectures. One of the principal motives for allowing the existing separation of the ark from the tabernacle to continue may have been that, during the time the two sanctuaries had been separated two high priests had arisen, one of whom officiated at the tabernacle of Gibeon, whilst the other (Abiathar) had been the channel of all Divine communications to David during his persecution, and had also officiated as high priest in his camp; so that he could no more think of deposing him from the office which he had hitherto filled, in consequence of the reorganisation of the legal worship, than he could of deposing Zadok, of the line of Eleazar, the officiating high priest at Gibeon. Moreover, David may from the very first have regarded the service which he instituted at Zion as merely a provisional arrangement." (*Keil.*) **"David offered."** "Of course not in his own person, but through the priests." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 18. **"He blessed,"** etc. "Not the Aaronic *blessing* (Numb. vi. 22), which pertained only to the high priest, but, like Solomon's (1 Kings viii. 55), a concluding benedictory address to the whole people." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 19. **"A piece,"** etc. The words *of flesh* have no counterpart in the Hebrew; most translators read a *measure* or *cup*, and may signify anything (probably here a portion of the sacrifice) *measured out.* **A flagon of wine** is not in the original, which ought to have been rendered a *grape* or *raisin cake, i.e.*, dried grapes pressed into a cake.

Ver. 20. **"Uncovered himself in the eyes of the hand-maids."** This means simply that David exchanged his royal robes for the simple and comparatively short priestly dress and led the female choir which Michal should have led herself. Some have suggested that in the word handmaids Michal refers to the other wives of David, of whom she was probably jealous. There is no equivalent in Hebrew to the word *shamelessly*, and the words *naked and uncovered* are often used by sacred and other ancient writers in a comparative and limited sense.

Ver. 21. **"Before the Lord."** "This expression denotes the holiest and highest point of view whence David's procedure in this festival is to be judged and estimated." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 22. **"I will yet be more vile,"** etc. "David, having opposed to Michal's 'in the eyes of the maids' his 'in the presence of the Lord,' places himself before the Lord on the same level with the maids, expressing by the repeated *with* (translated *of* in Eng. vers.) his fellowship

and equality with these humble folk and pointing to the honour which he with them would have before the Lord." (*Erdmann.*) So also in substance Keil, though some scholars contend that the Hebrew proposition may be rendered *of* or *before*, and explain that David refers to the honour which he received and valued from those whom Michal despised.

Ver. 23. "**No child.**" As is well known, the greatest humiliation which could befal any oriental woman, and especially one who might have hoped to be the mother of the heir to the throne. Some have, however, supposed that she had children before this event.

NOTE.—Psalms xiv., xv., xxiii., and xxiv. are referred by Hengstenberg to this occasion Dean Stanley says, "No less than seven Psalms, either in their traditional titles, or in the irresistible evidence of their contents, bear traces of this festival. The 29th (by its title in the Sept.) is said to be on the 'going forth of the tabernacle.' As the *tabernacle* was never moved from Gibeon in David's time, the *ark* is probably meant. The others are the 15th, 24th, 30th, 68th, 132nd, 141st." (See also his remarks in the Suggestive Comments.) The manner in which Psalm xxiv. was probably sung is thus described by Dr. Kitto:—"The chief musician, who seems to have been the king himself, appears to have begun the sacred lay with a solemn and sonorous recital of these sentences, 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.' The chorus of vocal music appears then to have taken up the song, and sung the same words in a more tuneful and elaborate manner; and the instruments fell in with them, raising the mighty declaration to heaven. We may presume that the chorus then divided, each singing in their turns, and both joining at the close, 'For He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods." This part of the music may be supposed to have lasted until the procession reached the foot of Zion, or came in sight of it, which, from the nature of the inclosed site, cannot be till one comes quite near to it. Then the king must be supposed to have stepped forth and begun again, in a solemn and earnest tone, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall shall stand in His holy place?' to which the first chorus responds, 'He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.' And then the second chorus gives its reply, 'He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.' This part of the song may, in like manner, be supposed to have lasted till they reached the gate of the city, when the king began again in this grand and exalted strain, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in;' which would be repeated then, in the same way as before, by the general chorus. The persons having charge of the gates ask, 'Who is this King of glory?' to which the first chorus answers, 'It is Jehovah, strong and mighty: Jehovah, mighty in battle;' which the second chorus then repeats in like manner as before, closing with the grand refrain, 'He is the king of glory: He is the King of glory.' We must now suppose the instruments to take up the same notes, and continue sounding them to the entrance of the tabernacle (or tent) which David had prepared. There the king again begins: 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.' This is followed and answered as before—all closing by the instruments sounding, and the people shouting, 'He is the King of glory.'"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

THE REMOVAL OF THE ARK TO ZION.

In this chapter we have—

I. Extraordinary religious emotions overflowing into extraordinary modes of expression. When a river has been long pent up and impeded in its flow, the removal of the dam at last is the signal for an extraordinary rush of the waters—such a rush as will make it impossible to confine them within the ordinary and appointed channels, but must for a time cause them to overflow the river banks. David's soul had long been filled with deep gratitude to God for the extraordinary blessings which had been bestowed upon him, and this gratitude had kindled within him lofty and holy aspirations and desires which until now he had been unable fully to express. But now that the obstacles are removed and he finds himself established over Israel, elected alike by God and man to shepherd the chosen people, his deep emotion breaks through all conventionalities, and his gratitude for the past and hope for the future are too deep and strong to keep within the limits of ordinary expression, and the

overflow of feeling must for a time have a wider channel. There are ever and anon such souls as that of David rising above the dead level of ordinary religious experience, who are at times the subjects of such deep religious enthusiasm as to demand extraordinary and special modes of expressing it.

II. Extraordinary religious emotion expressing itself by a deed of permanent and beneficent influence. The gold in the molten state is gold, and has a certain value; but if it is to be useful to mankind the glowing liquid metal must pass into solid coin. So feeling is good, and its outward and personal manifestation is lawful and right. But if it begin and end there, it is like gold which is always in the crucible, and never makes the world the richer by its existence. David's deep emotion did not expend itself in singing and dancing before the Lord. These were but the accompaniments to a deed by which he gave a permanent expression to his feelings, and brought down blessing upon all under his influence. The removal of the ark to Zion at the earliest opportunity after the settlement of the kingdom was not only a testimony to David's own faith in Jehovah, but a call to all Israel to restore the God of their fathers to His rightful place in their midst, and so to build their national unity upon a secure foundation. If we had no other guarantee for the reality and purity of David's religious fervour, this great national act would be sufficient to show its genuineness and worth. Thus far we have looked only at the bright points of the picture; we must also regard the shadows in it. The circumstances surrounding the death of Uzzah teach us—

III. That under the influence of strong emotion we are in danger of being betrayed into irreverence. Though we allow the pent-up river some extension of its ordinary bounds, it must be prevented if possible from exceeding all limits and so becoming a means of destruction instead of blessing. But here is the difficulty and the danger. So is it with us all when our emotional nature has full sway over us in matters connected with the service and worship of God. When we are wholly occupied in contemplating His infinite love and condescension, we are apt to lose sight of His awful holiness and majesty, and our joy betrays us into irreverence and neglect of some plain command. It must have been such a transport of feeling which tended to make David at this time so strangely neglectful of God's express command respecting the ark. We must not forget that the general confusion of the country, and the long banishment of the ark from the public service of God, had no doubt tended to render even the best men less conversant with the Divine requirements than they would have been in happier times, but it seems strange that such a man as David should not have been careful to observe all things written in the book of the law upon this matter. We can only account for it by remembering how prone even good men are to perform one holy duty at the expense of another, and either to approach God in worship with irreverent familiarity or to stand too far off in mere external observance of forms and ceremonies. From the closing incident in the chapter we learn—

IV. How impossible it is for hearts untouched by love to God to enter into the feelings of one under its dominion. To Michal the transports of David seemed more like the excitement of a madman, and his expressions of deep feeling foolish and degrading performances. But this was because she lacked that sympathy with him which is the only key to the soul of another, and without which all its deepest and holiest experiences must remain a mystery. And sympathy is only possible where there is some similarity of feeling and experience, and there is none between a godly and a godless person upon the most vital and soul-stirring subjects. Michal could as little enter into David's feelings as Judas could into those of Mary when she broke the box

of perfume over the head of her Lord, or as Festus could into those of Paul when the prisoner in bonds discoursed with such glowing enthusiasm to those who sat in pomp upon the judgment seat. To those who have no spiritual life religious fervour is looked upon either as fanaticism or hypocrisy, and the purest actions attributed to the most unworthy motives. This is a trial to which all eminent servants of God are exposed, and sometimes, as in the case before us, it comes through those who are near and dear according to the flesh, though far off according to the spirit. "*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" (1 Cor. ii. 14.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. What a contrast to the ordinary rule of public life, and of private life too! Where shall we find the public men, whose first concern is for the honour of God, and who really believe that the favour of the Highest is the true palladium of their country's welfare? Or when, in private life, shall the rule be reversed, to give to temporal interests and worldly comforts the first share of attention—while the cause of Christ . . . is either wholly neglected, or served with mere scraps and fragments? "If I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 6. It must be men's care "that their deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God" (John iii. 21). Two things make a good Christian—good actions and good aims. A good aim maketh not a bad action good, as here, and yet a bad aim maketh a good action bad, as we see in Jehu.—*Trapp.*

A man would think this act deserved commendation rather than punishment, for, alas! what should he have done? The ark had long sojourned in his father's house, and he and his brother had done (at least as he conceived) acceptable service about it. In this present removal, by the king's appointment (at least by his consent) as his brother went before to *guide*, so his place was behind to attend and help. . . . He saw the oxen staggering, the cart shaking, the ark rolling and he (as it should seem) next at hand, and who would not have put forth his hand in such a case? Had the ark actually fallen through his neglect, would not the whole multitude have cried shame upon him and perchance done worse unto him? The Philistines would have blasphemed, that the ark of the God of Israel had now at length caught a fall, as well as their Dagon had formerly before the ark. Devotion in the people would have been abated, religion scandalized, God's ordinances and holy mysteries less reverenced and esteemed. But infinite such pretensions weigh nothing, where the law of God, and obedience required of man are laid in the contrary scale.—*Bp. Prideaux.*

Ver. 7. The special moral of this warning is, that no one, on the plea of zeal for the ark of God's Church, should resort to doubtful expedients and unlawful means for the attainment of his end. Let him not say, that for the advancement of the Church of God, all acts are pleasing to Him. No; if the vessel of the Church is tossed with storms, the disciples may not approach and touch Him with familiar irreverence in order to awake Him who sleeps as man, but who sees all things as God. Here is the trial of their faith. Let them tarry the Lord's leisure, and He will rise and succour them, and bless them for their trust in Him.—*Wordsworth.*

You must rather leave the ark of the Church to shake, if so it please God, than put unworthy hands to hold it up.—*Lord Bacon.*

This interruption of a joyful festival was to everyone a new admonition, that the kindness and grace of God are never

alone, but are always accompanied by his *holiness*. God never permits it that anyone should sin, and yet, sinning, should rejoice and be glad before him. If his benevolence tends to draw us aside to levity and presumption, we will soon see Him exchange gentleness for severity, though He thereby imbitter to us the fairest day of our lives. In educating us, God cares more that we should *fear* Him (with the more of a child-like spirit the better) as the *Holy One*, and as demanding holiness in us, than that we should always prosecute our pilgrimage-journey here below with unclouded joy. He therefore causes it frequently to happen that we are compelled, in the midst of the superabundance of our prosperity and of our joy, suddenly to join in the lamentation of Job, "Thou art become cruel to me; with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me."—*Krummacher.*

Uzzah here was struck down at the inauguration of a new era in the Jewish worship; and Ananias and Sapphira were punished in the same way in the early infancy of the Christian Church.

Now the connection of this latter case with that of Uzzah here will show you how we in these days can be guilty of Uzzah's sin. The Corinthians were guilty of it when, forgetting the sacred character of the Lord's Supper, they became intoxicated at the table of the Lord; and we shall be guilty of it if, with hearts estranged from God, and lives which are inconsistent with His Word, we presume to connect ourselves with His Church, and take part in the management of its affairs. David, therefore, rightly read the meaning of the breach of Uzzah when, in addition to rectifying his error by putting the ark on the shoulders of the priests, he sang these words: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart;" and unless we who are members of the Church have this character, we shall be guilty of Uzzah's sin.—*Taylor.*

Ver. 8. *A man displeased with God;* thinking himself wiser, more kind, more just than God. Really, perhaps, vexed that his grand solemnity was interrupted, his rejoicing people disappointed, his prestige damaged, his enemies encouraged. Often when men complain of Providence on "high moral" grounds, they are in fact mainly influenced by some secret personal feeling. Now highly elated with spiritual pride, at once angry and self-complacent, and presently dejected, irritated and disposed to give up altogether. (Ver. 9.) When any promising religious enterprise of which *we* have had the lead is disastrously interrupted, we are tempted to find fault with Providence.—*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 9. I do not hear David say, Surely this man is guilty of some secret sin that the world knows not; God hath met with him, there is no danger to us; why should I be discouraged to see God just? We may go on safely and prosper. But here his foot stays, and his hand falls from his instrument, and his tongue is ready to tax his own unworthiness: "How shall the ark of the Lord come unto me?" That heart is carnal and proud that thinks any man worse than himself. David's fear stays his progress: perhaps he might have proceeded with good success, but he dares not venture where he sees such a deadly check. It is better to be too fearful than too forward in those affairs which do immediately concern God. As it is not good to refrain from holy businesses, so it is worse to do them ill: awfulness is a safe interpreter of God's secret actions, and a wise guide of ours.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 11. See here the courage and faith of Obed-edom; he knew that the presence of the ark had been disastrous to Dagon, and had brought plagues on the Philistines, and that the men of Bethshemesh had been struck dead for looking into it, and that Uzzah had been smitten for touching it; and yet he gladly welcomed it and harboured it for three months, and God blessed him for his faith. Obed-edom well

knew that though "God is a consuming fire" to those who treat Him with irreverence, He is infinite in mercy to those who obey Him. The Gadarenes, smitten with fear, besought Jesus to depart out of their coasts, and we do not hear that He ever visited them again. But Zaccheus, animated by love, received him gladly, and Jesus said, "This day is salvation come to this house." (Luke xix. 9.) All divine things are set, as Christ Himself was, "for the fall and rising again of many in Israel" (Luke ii. 34), they are a savour (or odour) of death unto death to those who reject or despise them, but "an odour of life unto life" to those who love them. (2 Cor. ii. 16). —*Wordsworth.*

While the ark brought the plague everyone was glad to be rid of it; but when it brought a blessing to Obed-edom, they looked upon it as worthy of entertainment. Many will own a blessing ark, a prospering truth; but he is an Obed-edom indeed that will own a persecuted, tossed, banished ark. —*Trapp.*

Ver. 12. When pious men who have been betrayed into unwarrantable conduct have had time for self-examination, searching the Scriptures and prayer, they will discover and confess their mistakes and be reduced to a better temper; they will justify God in His corrections; they will be convinced that safety and comfort consist, not in absenting themselves from His ordinances, or in declining dangerous services, but in attending to their duty in a proper spirit and manner. They will profit by their own errors.—*Scott.*

Vers. 14-15. Now the sweet singer of Israel revives his holy music, and adds both more spirit and more pomp to so devout a business. I did not before hear of trumpets, nor dancing, nor shouting, nor sacrifice, nor the linen ephod. The sense of God's past displeasure doubles our care to please Him, and our joy in His recovered approbation; we never make so much of our health as after sickness, nor ever are so officious to our friend as after an unkindness.—*Bp. Hall.*

Evidently this service was not looked on as a toilsome one, but as a happy occasion, admirably adapted to raise the spirits and cheer the heart. What was the nature of the service? . . . In spirit it was bringing God into the very midst of the nation; and on the most prominent pedestal the country now supplied, setting up a constant memento of the presence of the Holy One. . . To those who knew Him as their reconciled Father, the service was inexpressibly attractive. Why should there not be more joy in the worship of this gracious God? Why should our praises not be, at times at least, more lively, fitted to express and deepen such feelings of exuberant delight in the presence of a covenant God?—*Blaikie.*

Vers. 13-19. This was the greatest day of David's life. Its significance in his career is marked by his own pre-eminent position: Conqueror, Poet, Musician, Priest, in one. . . . But the Psalms which directly and indirectly spring out of this event reveal a deeper meaning than the mere outward ritual. It was felt to be a turning point in the history of the nation. It recalled even the great epoch of the passage through the wilderness. It awoke again the inspiriting strains of the heroic career (Psa. lxviii. 7-9, comp. Judges v. 4) of the Judges. . . . That glory which fled when the ark was taken was now returning. From the lofty towers the warders cry, "Who is this King of Glory?" The old heathen gates will not at once recognise this new comer. The answer comes back, as if to prove by the victories of David the right of the name to Him who now comes to His own again, Jehovah, the Lord, the Mighty One. . . . This is the solemn inauguration of that great name by which the Divine Nature was especially known under the monarchy. As, before, under the patriarchs, it had been known as *Elohim*, the strong ones'—as through Moses it had been *Jehovah*—the Eternal,—so, now, in this new epoch

of civilisation, of armies, of all the complicated machinery of second causes, of Church and State, there was to be a new name expressive of a wider range of vision opening on the minds of the people. Not merely the Eternal solitary existence—but the Maker and Sustainer of the host of heaven and earth . . . were now attracting the attention and wonder of men. Not merely the Eternal Lord of the solitary human soul, but the Leader and Sustainer of the hosts of battle, of the hierarchy of war and peace that gathered round the court of the kings of Israel. . . . This great change is briefly declared in corresponding phrase in the historical narrative which tells how David "brought up the ark of God whose name is called by the name of the Lord of Hosts." This was indeed as the 68th Psalm describes it, a second Exodus. David, was, on that day, the founder not of freedom only, but of empire—not of religion only, but of a Church and commonwealth.—*Dean Stanley.*

The ark had been the witness to the people that they were one people, because they had the one God dwelling in the midst of them while they were shifting their tents continually in the wilderness. It was to be the same truth to those who were dwelling in settled habitations. . . . It spoke to them, as it had to the others, of a permanent Being, of a righteous Being, always above His creatures, always desiring fellowship with them, a fellowship which they could only realise when they were seeking to be like Him. "Lord, who shall ascend to Thy tabernacle?" "who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?"—so spake David as he brought the ark to its resting place. "Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart." . . . The moral being of the nation, then, as of each individual in it, stood in the confession of a person absolutely good, the ground of all goodness in His creatures, accessible to them while they sought Him with fear and reverence as the King, Protector, Friend, of each and all.—*Maurice.*

Ver. 19. This was a most characteristic act—an index of that delight in the comfort and welfare of his people that marked the character of David. It may be that the practice is liable to abuse, . . . yet it was a pleasing feature of this memorable occasion. It has a lesson especially appropriate to wealthy Christians on occasions of lawful rejoicings. In the olden time the festival of Christmas used to be thus observed, and there were far worse things about the old feudal system than the flowing hospitality which used to make poor men feel that times of refreshing for the soul opened men's hearts to their bodily wants. It would be quite in the spirit of David's example for wealthy Christians to make communion seasons and similar occasions times of ample distribution.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 20. Let us learn from the conduct of David in retiring to bless his house, that public religious services should not be allowed by us to interfere with the discharge of the duties of family religion. After such a day as that which we have attempted to describe, David might have imagined that he had a good excuse for omitting all domestic worship; but it rather seemed that the devotions of the day gave him new zest for the exercises of the family altar. And this is what always ought to be. It is to be feared, however, that many among us content themselves with a mere go-to-meeting piety, and seem to believe that religion consists in a round of public religious services. They attend all manner of holy convocations. You see them at every important devotional meeting you take part in. But they rarely enter the closet; they never bless their houses; and their lives are just as selfish and unspiritual as are those of multitudes who make no profession of attachment to Jesus whatever. I do not make light of the ordinances of God's worship; on the contrary, I believe them to be most serviceable in feeding the fire of piety within the heart. But what I mean to say is,

that piety does not consist in attending on these means of grace, and that our engagement in public services must never be made an excuse by us for the neglect of household duties. "Why did you not come to church last night," said one working-man to another, on a Monday morning; "our minister was preaching a third sermon on the duty of family religion; why did you not come?" "Because," was the reply, "I was at home doing it." I would like to see not less earnestness in attendance at the sanctuary but more of this "at home doing it."—*Taylor.*

A man may be as zealous as he pleases about what relates to *this* life only, and yet be had in admiration; but to be zealous in religion seems to be regarded a mark of imbecility. Devotion to God alone is regarded as something degrading—something unworthy the dignity of man—which renders him a fit subject for the finger of scorn to point at—for the ridicule or contempt of a world that lieth in wickedness.—*Lindsay.*

Ver. 21. It is hard for the best men to recriminate without some tincture of tartness, and to keep quick the fire of zeal without some smoke of sin.—*Trapp.*

Vers. 21, 22. If David had not loved Michal dearly, he had never stood upon those points with Abner: he knew that if Abner came to him, the kingdom of Israel would accompany him; and yet he sends him the charge of not seeing his face, except he brought Michal, Saul's daughter, with him; as if he would not regard the crown of Israel while he wanted that wife of his: yet here he takes her up roundly, as if she had been an enemy. All relations are aloof off, in comparison of that betwixt God and the soul: "He that loves father, or mother, or wife, or child, better than me (saith our Saviour), is not worthy of me."—*Bp. Hall.*

1. We should be afraid of censuring the devotion of others, though it may not agree with our own sentiments, because, for aught that we know, the heart may be upright in it, and who are we, to despise those whom God has accepted? 2. If we can approve ourselves to God in what we do in religion, and do it as before the Lord, we need not value the censures and reproaches of men. 3. The more we are vilified for well-doing the more resolute we should be in it, and hold our religion the faster, and bind it the closer to us, for the endeavours of Satan's agents to shake us and to shame us out of it.—*Henry.*

Vers. 14-22. In the portrait of David, as it here appears to our view, several essential marks of a true state of grace unveil themselves before us. There are these five. We may describe them thus, in the language of the New Testament:—(1.) *Joy in Christ;* (2.) *separation from the world;* (3.) the *open confession of the crucified one;* (4.) *love to the people of God;* and (5.) *bearing willingly the shame of the cross.* But how frequently does one meet such ill-temper as that of Michal even at the present day! It displays itself when at any time one belonging to the higher ranks of life, who has been brought, through the grace of God, from the "broad way," salutes in the time of his "first love" every companion in the faith as a brother, and is happiest among those who, whether they be distinguished in rank or lowly, rejoice like himself in the Lord; worships in the same fellowship, and joins with them in spiritual songs; meeting familiarly with the lowliest among them, as if birth, position, rank, and social etiquette were the most indifferent things in the world. How frequently does one also see relations and friends change their demeanour towards such as disregard the conventional boundaries, and convert it into hateful mockery! That king himself did not escape such scorn whom history has adorned with the name of the "Confessor," and who once, when in the presence of an assembly of believing preachers, gave free expression in high excitement to the feelings of his heart,

glowing with love to Christ, "I know well," he said, "it is not politic for me to say what I now utter in your presence;" but he did not, on that account, for a moment check the flow of his thoughts and feelings. But this state of pious elevation of mind never continues long. It soon gives place to the accustomed calm and uniform course of thought. David is not alway so lofty in his experience as he was on that day of festal joy. But he is deserving of pity who understands not the flapping of the eagle's wings, by which souls consecrated to God are in times of particular visitations of grace lifted up above all the boundaries of their common life, and placed in a condition where, in the emotions that fill them, they rise above all earthly things.—*Krummacher.*

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—**Ver. 1. "When the king sat in his house," etc.,** *i.e.* the palace mentioned in chap. v. 11. Many commentators place the events of this chapter later on in the life of David, inasmuch as they think it could not be said at this period that he had "rest from all his enemies," yet nearly all agree in understanding from ver. 11 that Solomon was, not born at the time. It therefore seems necessary to understand the rest spoken of as only a temporary interval of peace (for he was more or less involved in war until the end of his life), and if so, the conception of building a temple to Jehovah seems to follow here most naturally. It is quite in keeping with David's devout character, and just what we should expect from him, that his first interval of repose should be occupied with such a purpose.

Ver. 2. "Nathan, the prophet." This prophet here appears for the first time, and it is evident that he sustained a similar relation to David as Samuel and Gad had done, and as the latter still continued to do (see chap. xxiv. 11-19). "If the expression first and last in 2 Chron. ix. 29 is to be taken literally, he must have lived late into the life of Solomon, in which case he must have been considerably younger than David. At any rate he seems to have been the younger of the two prophets who accompanied him, and may be considered as the latest direct representative of the schools of Samuel. The peculiar affix of 'the prophet' as distinguished from the 'seer' given to Samuel and Gad (1 Chron. xxix. 29) shows his identification with the later view of the prophetic office indicated in 1 Sam. ix. 9." (*Dean Stanley.*) Most bible scholars consider that this part of the book of Samuel is at least compiled from Nathan's work mentioned in 1 Chron. xxix. 29. **Within curtains,** literally, *within the tent-cloth.*

Ver. 3. "Nathan said," etc. This answer shows that, even if David did not expressly state his intention, Nathan understood his purpose to build the temple, and sanctioned his design "from his own feelings, not by Divine revelation." *(Michaelis.)*

Ver. 4. "That night." The one following the day in which the conversation took place. **"The Word of the Lord came."** "By the conversation held with David during the day, Nathan's soul with all its thoughts and feelings was concentrated on David's great and holy purpose; this was the psychological basis for the Divine inspiration." *(Erdmann)* **"Shalt thou,"** etc. "The question involves a negative reply." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 6, 7. Here "Jehovah gives two reasons why David's proposal should not be carried out . . . but this does not involve any blame as though there had been any presumption on David's part . . . but simply showed that it was not because of any negligence on the part of the former leaders of the people that they had not thought of erecting a temple, and that even now the time for such a work had not yet come." *(Keil)*

Ver. 11. "And as since," etc. The first clause of this verse should be connected with verse 10, thus, *neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as before and as since, or from the day, etc.*

Ver 8-11. "The connection between these verses and verses 5-7 is as follows: Thou shalt not build a house for *Me*, but I, who have from the very beginning glorified myself in thee and my people, will build a house for thee. . . . The kingdom of God in Israel first acquired its rest and consolation through the efforts of David . . . . and the conquest of Zion and the

elevation of this fortress into the palace of the king formed the commencement of the establishment of the kingdom of God. But this commencement received its first pledge of perpetuity from the Divine assurance that the throne of David should be established for all future time. And this the Lord was about to accomplish. He would build David a house, and then his seed should build the house of the Lord. No definite reason is assigned why David himself was not to build the temple; we learn this first from 1 Chron. xxii. 8. . . . But this did not involve David in any blame . . . but inasmuch as these wars were necessary and inevitable, they were practical proofs that David's kingdom and government were not yet established, and therefore that the time for the building of the temple had not yet come." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 12. **"Thy seed."** "Not the whole posterity, as is clear from the explanatory words in 1 Chron. xvii. 11, nor merely a single individual, but a selection from the posterity." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 14. **"A father,"** etc. This denotes in the first place the most cordial mutual *love*, which attests its enduring character by *fidelity*, and demonstrates its existence towards the Lord by active *obedience*. But besides this *ethical* relation of David's seed to God we must, from the connection, note—*first*, the origin, or descent of the son from the father. The seed of David, entrusted with everlasting kingly dignity, has, as such, his origin in the will of God—owes his origin to the Divine choice and call (comp. Psa. ii. 7, lxxxix. 27, 28). *Secondly*, in the designations *father* and *son* is denoted *community* of possession. The seed as *son* receives dominion from the father as *heir*, and as this dominion is an everlasting one he will, as son and heir, reign *for ever* in the possession of the kingdom. The father's kingdom is an unlimited one, embracing the whole world; so in the idea of sonship there lies, along with *everlastingness*, the idea of all-embracing-world-dominion." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 14. **"With the rod of men,"** etc. Such punishments as are inflicted on all men when they sin. Grace is not to release David and the Davidic line from this universal human lot, is not to be for them a charter to sin." *(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 15. **"As I took it from Saul,"** etc. "The contrast is between the punishment of sin in individuals and the favour that remains permanently with the family, whereby the Divine promise becomes an *unconditional* one." *(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 16. **"For ever."** It is obvious that this promise related primarily to Solomon, and had a certain fulfilment in him and in his reign. . . . . At the same time, the substance of the promise is not fully exhausted in him. The threefold repetition of the expression "for ever," the establishment of the kingdom and throne of David *for ever*, points incontrovertibly beyond the time of Solomon, and to the eternal continuance of the seed of David. . . . . We must not reduce the idea of eternity to the popular notion of a long incalculable period, but must take it in an absolute sense as it is evidently understood in Psa. lxxxix. 30. No earthly kingdom, and no posterity of any single man, has eternal duration like the heaven and the earth; but the different families of men become extinct as the different earthly kingdoms perish. The posterity of David, therefore, could only last for ever by running out in a person who lives for ever; *i.e.*, by culminating in the Messiah. . . . . The promise consequently refers to the posterity of David, commencing with Solomon and closing with Christ; so that by the *seed* we are not to understand Solomon alone, with the kings who succeeded him, nor Christ alone to the exclusion of the earthly kings of David's family; nor is the allusion to Solomon and Christ to be regarded as a double allusion to two different objects." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 17. **"Words."** . . . **"Vision."** "The *words*, as the content of God's revelation to Nathan, are distinguished from the *vision* as indication of its *form* and *mode*." *(Erdmann.)* "The *vision* (a communication received in a waking condition) is constantly distinguished from a revelation in a *dream*." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 18. **"Sat,"** rather *tarried*. "Even if the verb be rendered *sat*, it is not necessary to suppose that David remained sitting." *(Bib. Commentary.)* "Yet sitting under such circumstance would be a respectful attitude, and elsewhere we have no proof in Scripture of a customary attitude in prayer." *(Tr. of Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 19. **"Manner of man."** Rather the *law* of man, *i.e.*, according to Keil, "the law which determines or regulates the conduct of men." The explanations of this phrase are very varied and numerous. Keil, Grotius, Thenius, De Witte, Hengstenberg, and others, with some differences, understand it to refer to the condescension of Jehovah in treating David as one human creature might treat another, and think the parallel text in Chron., chap. xvii. 17 confirms this view. Many expositors give it a direct Messianic reference, and others thus paraphrase it: "It is not thus that men act towards one another, but Thy ways, O Lord, are above men's ways." But the objection to this and to the meaning given above is that the word translated law is in these cases rather taken as *manner* or *custom*, which it does not signify.

Erdmann says "*This* must be referred to the Divine determination that the everlasting kingdom here spoken of is to be in connection with his house. This is the Divine *torah* or prescription which is to hold for a weak insignificant man and his seed, for poor human creatures." Similarly *Von Gerlach:* "Such a law Thou establishest for a man and his house, viz., that Thou promisest it everlasting duration." So also *Bunsen:* "Of so grand a promise hast Thou, O God, thought a man worthy."

Ver. 21. "**For Thy word's sake.**" "This must contain an allusion to the earlier promises of God, or the Messianic prophecies generally, particularly Gen. xlix. 10, and Numb. xxiv. 17 *sqq.* For the fact that David recognised the connection between the promise communicated to him by Nathan and Jacob's prophecy is evident from 1 Chron. xxviii. 4, where he refers to his election as king as being the consequence of Judah's election as ruler." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 23. "**Whom God.**" Elohim here stands with a plural verb, as often elsewhere when heathen idols are referred to (as Exod. xxxii. 4–8), because the thought is here intended to be expressed that there is no other nation which the deity worshipped by it redeemed as Jehovah redeemed Israel. (So Keil, Erdmann, etc.) "**For you.**" If this reading is correct, David's sudden turning from addressing God to addressing the nation must be attributed to his deep emotion.

Ver. 29. "**Let the house,**" etc., rather "**Will the house,**" **i.e., God has said it, and it will be so.**"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—7.

David forbidden to Build the Temple.

I. A good man's desire may be in harmony with the mind of God, yet its accomplishment may be contrary to the Divine will. It must always be right and always pleasing to a good father for his son to desire to honour him and to express by some outward act his sense of love and gratitude. But while the feeling is in itself most acceptable to him, he may desire it to take some other form of expressing itself, or he may see that some other season will be a more fitting one for this particular outward expression of his child's love and reverence. The feeling which prompts the desire must be right at all seasons, but the accomplishment of the desire may be unseasonable or undesirable. So it was with David's desire and purpose at this period. It was most fitting and could not but be pleasing to God that David should desire to build Him a house far more beautiful than his own palace. We should feel that David was out of harmony with himself if he had sat contentedly in his palace while the ark of God was within curtains. And it is plain that the feelings which gave birth to his purpose were very acceptable to God, as all grateful emotion and desire to express them must ever be. Yet he was forbidden to carry out his design. Let no good man, then, ever think that, because his desire is not fulfilled it is displeasing to God. It may be quite the opposite. The gratitude and reverence that desires to do something for the glory of God must be most pleasing to such a God as ours; but although the feeling may be genuine and the motive pure, He may see reasons for not permitting the purpose to be carried out.

II. Those who instruct others in the oracles of God may be right in their general interpretation of the Divine will, and yet wrong in their application to special instances. Every servant of God is sure that it is the will of God that His glory shall be the ruling aim, and His service the first thought in the life of His children. But he may sometimes be mistaken as to the best methods of promoting that glory or the best time for undertaking a special service, and he must not therefore be dogmatic on these matters. Nathan was quite right in encouraging David in his endeavours to bring his own people and the surrounding nations into more intimate relation with the God of Israel. Like that of all the good in all ages his prayer was "*Let the people praise Thee, O God;*

let all the people praise Thee." But right as he was in the general principle, he erred in the special application on this occasion. Although it was quite true that the Lord was with David in the sense of approval of his general feeling, He was not with him in the sense that He would permit him to undertake this particular work.

III. But when God's servants sincerely desire to do His will, He will not permit them to remain long in ignorance. If a father knows that his children only need to know what is right in order to do it, it would surely be cruel of him to let them remain in ignorance. And when our Heavenly Father sees in His children such integrity of heart that they joyfully acquiesce in His purposes concerning themselves, and desire above all other things His guidance, we cannot for a moment suppose He will withhold from them a revelation of His will. When they are permitted to err, it must be because there is some self-will which prevents entire singleness of purpose—some alloy mixed with the pure gold of a desire right in the main. David and Nathan were very soon put in full possession of God's mind in respect to the building of the temple, and that it was so is a proof of their undivided loyalty to the Divine will, and a pledge that all who are like minded shall be as certainly instructed in the work they are to do and the part they are to fulfil.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 2. The sentiment underlying these words was in the highest degree honourable to David. They indicate that he felt it to be a moral anomaly, if not a species of dishonesty, that he should look so well after his own personal comfort and regal dignity, while yet the house of God was but a tent. It were well, in these days, that we all shared these convictions, for we are too apt to lavish our wealth exclusively upon our own enjoyment and indulgence, forgetful of the higher claims which God and His cause have upon us. I say not, indeed, that it is wrong for a man to take such a position in society as his riches warrant him to assume, or that there is sin in spending money on our residences, or in surrounding ourselves with the treasures of human wisdom in books, or the triumphs of human art in pictures or statuary; but I do say that our gifts to the cause of God ought to be at least abreast of our expenditure for these other things; and that if we so cripple ourselves by our extravagance on house, or dress, or luxuries, as to render it impossible for us to do anything for the promotion of the Gospel abroad, or for the instruction of the ignorant at home, we are "verily guilty concerning our brethren," and before our God. The principle here acknowledged by David is a thoroughly sound one, and though he was discouraged from applying it in the particular way on which he had set his heart, we must not suppose that his feelings, as expressed to Nathan, were wrong. On the contrary, the spiritual instinct in him was true, and God declared that "it was well that it was in his heart." Now what was this principle? It was this, that in proportion as we increase our expenditure upon ourselves for the comforts and the elegancies of life, we ought to increase our offerings to God for the carrying on of works of faith and labours of love among our fellow-men. If we can afford to enter a larger dwelling, we ought to make ourselves afford to add proportionately to our contributions for all good objects. If we allow ourselves to gratify our taste in the purchase of a new picture or a new book, we should feel impelled to do just so much more for the gratification of the impulse of Christian benevolence. The value of this principle, when rightly understood, and conscientiously carried out, will be very great. It will act in two ways. On the one hand, it will keep us from hampering ourselves in our benevolence

by personal extravagance, and so be a check on that tendency to luxury which is manifested even in many Christian households. On the other hand, it will impel us to add to our gifts to the Lord Jesus Christ; since every time we do anything for ourselves there will be a new call made upon us to do more for Him.—*Taylor.*

David was not one of those easy-minded men who are content to keep things just as they are, but one of those who are ever pressing onward, and urging others towards progress, improvement, development. A most useful order of mind it is, especially when duly ballasted by minds in which caution is more predominant. The world would stagnate — the church would settle down into the poorest and tamest society on earth, if such men were not raised up, with their trumpet-tongues and burning hearts, to rouse their fellows to high and lofty enterprise.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 4. God will not suffer His dear children to lie long in error; but if in anything they be otherwise minded, He will reveal even this unto them (Phil. iii. 15).—*Trapp.*

Vers. 4 and 5. God demands not so much splendid outward service, but rather an inner and honest service of the heart (Isa. iv. 24.)—*Schmid.*

God is much more desirous of giving to us than of receiving from us.—*Wuert. Bible.*

The true house of God is His people; there would He make His abode in the hearts of His own. A human heart that opens itself to God is a temple more pleasing to Him than the stateliest structure of gold and marble, and a church that really has the Lord dwelling in its midst is in the sight of God more precious than the noblest showy building which sets all the world a wondering.—*Schlier.*

Ver. 6. The curtained tabernacle had been specially designed by God to wean His people from those sensuous ideas of worship to which the gorgeous temples of Egypt had accustomed them; and to give them the true notion of a spiritual service, along with the visible emblem of a present God. The time had not quite arrived for changing this simple arrangement, and as long as it was God's pleasure to dwell in the tabernacle so long might David expect that His grace might be shed forth most abundantly there. And so, whenever it seems to be indicated by God in His providence that a body of worshippers should remain in a tent-like building, they may expect that He will then shine forth in the fulness of His grace.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 8. God signified His good acceptance by calling him His servant David; for at another time when he had offended it was plain David. (Chap. xxiv. 12.) *I took thee from the sheep-cote.* So that thou needest not to doubt of my love, though I use not thy service in this particular. *To be ruler over my people.* Do this well, and thou needest not be idle.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 9. *Fame.* 1. Fame is a gift of God's providence—hence to be enjoyed with humility. 2. Fame is one of God's noblest gifts—hence it may be desired and earnestly sought if righteously. 3. Fame, like all other gifts, has weighty responsibilities—hence to be used for the good of men and the glory of God.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 11. This thought contains the deep general truth that God must first of all build a man's house before the man can build God's house, and applies it especially to the kingdom of Israel. —*Keil.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12–16.

THE MESSIANIC PROMISE TO DAVID.

This promise—

I. Reveals the special purpose of God in the election of David. As the king now sits in his palace of cedar, God takes him back to the days when as a youth he followed the sheep. During all the years that had intervened, and in all the manifold experiences through which he had passed, he had been the object of special Divine care and guidance. His life had been such that, however he might have sometimes yielded to despair in the past, he must have now felt deeply conscious, upon looking back, that he had been highly favoured above all the men of his nation. Doubtless he was more gifted than most—perhaps than any,—but the gifts that fitted him for the throne were from the same Divine giver, and only increased his obligation. But he is here reminded that he had not been made thus great for his own sake alone, or chiefly. He was to use all that had been bestowed upon him for the people over whom he had been called to rule, and was to be the founder of a race through whom not only Israel but all the families of the earth were to be blessed. This is always the purpose of God's electing grace, whether of the individual or the nation. Men receive special favours that they may dispense special blessings, and are intended to be, not like those lakes in which a mighty river is ever emptying itself, and yet from which no stream ever flows, but like the fountain-head of that river which, as fast as it is fed by the mountain snows, sends forth its waters and becomes a channel of blessing to all around. The spirit of many of David's psalms reveal that he entered fully into the Divine purpose of his election, but the spirit of many, both of his immediate and remote descendants, shows that they utterly failed to discern it.

II. It reveals the progressive nature of the Divine dispensations in relation to man. A dim outline is here given to Nathan by prophetic vision of a kingdom far more glorious than that which David founded. We, who live after the earthly sceptre has departed from Judah, can fill in the details, and recognise in David's Lord the only Son who could establish his house for ever. In the kingdom of God under the Old Testament, the name of David takes a high place and among the kings of Israel he holds a deserved pre-eminence, on account of the great national blessings which attended his powerful and beneficent rule. But One who descended from him according to the flesh has, by the majesty of His person, and the excellence of His character, and the transcendent glory of His kingdom, caused the name of David to sink into nothing in comparison. The kingdom of Christ endures because it is founded upon a purely spiritual basis; it knows no limit of time or place because its laws have their origin in the eternal moral necessity of the universe. For its King rules always and everywhere because His throne is in the *heart* of each of His subjects. "*He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor;*" and therefore "*He shall be feared as long as the sun and moon endure.*" "*He shall spare the poor and needy*" and "*redeem their soul from deceit and violence,*" and the name of such a King *must* "*endure for ever*" and "*be continued as long as the sun*" (Psa. lxii). His name is called "*Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins,*" and as a necessary consequence, "*He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end.*" (Luke ii. 33). David was elected by God to shepherd Israel, and his reign was upon the whole fraught with blessing to his subjects. But the dispensation in which he ministered was, in comparison with that of the New Testament, only as

the acorn to the oak, and he could as little conceive of the glory of these latter days as we could picture to ourselves some monarch of the forest, if we had never seen anything more than the tiny seed which enfolds its germ. And God has yet more in reserve for the race for whom the Great Shepherd laid down His life. We as little comprehend what wonders of grace and glory are yet to be unfolded under the reign of Christ, as David comprehended all that was included in the word of the Lord which came to Nathan. We have the King of whom it spake, and who can never be succeeded by another; but we have no conception of the infinite possibilities yet hidden in God in connection with that kingdom which can never be removed but abideth for ever. "*Eye hath not*" yet "*seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*" (1 Cor. ii. 9).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

In considering this prophecy we need to bear in mind the peculiar form of the revelations respecting Messiah which God communicated to David. To other prophets, revelations of the Messiah were made *objectively*—apart from themselves; they were shown Christ and His day afar off; they had no more personal relation to the thing revealed than other believers around them. But when revelations of Messiah were made to David, they were usually connected with something in his own life, history, or experience; they had a shadowy foundation in something *subjective* or pesonal to himself; that thing enlarged, purified, glorified, constituted the revelation of Christ. This was in keeping with the typical relation which David and his kingdom had to Christ and His kingdom. As this was the character of the revelations made to David respecting Christ, so also was it the character of many of his prophetic songs. . . . Melting and shading insensibly into each other as the two classes of objects do, it is often extremely difficult to say which of them is meant. —*Blaikie.*

It is plain that the building of a house of rest for the ark was designed to stand out prominently in the sight of Israel as a great and mighty undertaking—as a work of sufficient magnitude and importance to form the one great enterprise of a king who could give himself to it without distraction or disturbance. Such was obviously the impression which the Divine appointment, regarding the building of a house for the name of God, must have made upon the minds of the people of Israel—the church of that day; and the reason why David was forbidden and Solomon permitted to build that house is still more clearly unfolded to us now that the promises and predictions connected with that work have been and are in the way of being fulfilled . . . . David was honoured to be an eminent type of the Messiah, inasmuch as, by his trials, his conflicts, and his conquests, he did very significantly prefigure a suffering, but at the same time, a triumphant Saviour. This however, was only one aspect of Christ's kingly office . . . there is another view—even the relation in which, as king, He stands to His church. . . . This view God was also graciously pleased to typify or prefigure in the kingly office as it had been established in Israel; and we cannot fail to perceive the wisdom which provided that this should be done, not in the person of the same king who was employed to represent Christ in His conflict and His victory, but in that of another who should be pre-eminently a peaceful king.—*Gordon.*

The fulfilment of the great and gracious promise of God to David in Christ the Son of David 1. In His *person*, He is not merely *David's* seed—seed of the *woman*—*Abraham's* seed, but also *God's Son.* 2. In His *office*, He is *King* over the kingdom of God, King of all Kings. 3. In His *possession of power*, He has an everlasting king-

dom, to Him is given all power in heaven and on earth. 4. In His *work*. He builds for the name of God the Father a *house*, a spiritual temple in humanity, out of living stones. (Comp. John ii. 19.)—*Lange's Commentary.*

Why is there this frequent repetition in this promise? (Verses 13 and 16). Three times is the perpetuity declared. Why is this? It is to meet the difficulties of our faith, arising from the lengthened suspension of the promise, and the apparent improbability of Christ's everlasting monarchy.—*Bickersteth.*

We have seen that David was himself a prophecy of Christ. It follows from that, therefore, that the Temple which he so desired to build is a prophecy of the Church. With all its grandeur under Solomon, that stately building was, after all, only a type of that more glorious spiritual fabric which is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord." Now, in the erection of this living temple we may all take part. When by faith in Jesus Christ we become united to Him, and receive the Holy Spirit into our hearts, we, as it were, build ourselves, or, in another aspect of it, are built by God, as living stones into that glorious edifice which Jehovah through the ages is rearing for His own eternal abode. When, again, by our instrumentality, either directly in the efforts which we put forth at home, or indirectly through the labours of those whom we sustain abroad, we work for the conversion of others, we are engaged as under-builders, on the same spiritual edifice, David would have counted it the highest privilege of his life if he had been permitted to build the Temple on Moriah; and even after the prohibition came by the mouth of Nathan, it was the joy of his latter years to collect materials wherewith Solomon, his son, might raise a house worthy of Jehovah's worship. Nay, more, in the days of Solomon himself, after the gorgeous structure had been raised, everyone who had done anything, however small, in the way of helping on its erection, was invested with a peculiar honour in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen. As the Psalm expresses it: "A man was famous according as he had lifted axes upon the thick trees." But a higher privilege, and a more lasting renown, will be the portion of him who assists in the most humble capacity in the uprearing of that Church which is to be "for a habitation of God through the Spirit." "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."—*Taylor.*

Ver. 13. Where Jesus reigns in power men must yield obedience of some sort. His kingdom, moreover, is no house of cards or dynasty of days: it is as lasting as the lights of heaven; days and nights will cease before He abdicates His throne. Neither sun nor moon as yet manifest any failure in their radiance, nor are there any signs of decrepitude in the Kingdom of Jesus, it is but in its youth, and is evidently the coming power, the rising sun. . . . *Throughout all generations* shall the throne of the Redeemer stand. Humanity shall not wear out the religion of the Incarnate God. No infidelity shall wither it away, nor superstition smother it; it shall rise immortal from what seemed its grave; as the true phœnix, it shall revive from its ashes. As long as there are men on earth Christ shall have a throne among them. Instead of the fathers shall be the children. Each generation shall have a regeneration in its midst, let Pope and devil do what they may. Even at this hour we have the tokens of His eternal power; since He ascended to His throne eighteen hundred years ago, His dominion has not been overturned, though the mightiest of empires have gone like visions of the night. We see on the shores of time the wrecks of the Cæsars, the relics of the Moguls, and the last remnant of the Ottomans. Charlemagne, Maximilian, Napoleon, how they flit like shadows before us!

They were and are not; but Jesus for ever is. As for the houses of Hohenzollern, Guelph, or Hapsburg, they have their hour; but the Son of David has all hours and ages as His own.—*Spurgeon.*

Ver. 16. *The advantages of civil government contrasted with the blessings of the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ.* 1. The first and primary advantage expected from every well constituted human government is *security*, and the *sense* of security. . . . Whatever may be the imperfections attaching to various modes of government, the *worst* is preferable to a state of society *destitute* of public authority and law; in *such* a state there can exist not only no *security*, but no *tranquillity* . . . . But the utmost that can be enjoyed under any form of civil power is a most imperfect *shadow* of the *safety* which Jesus Christ bestows upon the subjects of His *spiritual* reign. . . 2. The second benefit expected from human government is *liberty*. So far as this advantage is consistent with the former, the *more* largely it is enjoyed the *better*. Every *diminution* of our liberty, except such as is necessary to our *protection* from evils which might otherwise be apprehended, is itself just so much redundant *evil*. . . . Restraint that connot be justified by the production of some greater benefit than could be attained without it, is not *imperfection*, it is *injustice*. . . . But suppose the utmost degree of *civil* liberty to be enjoyed, what is that in comparison with that *real* spiritual freedom which Jesus Christ confers? . . . From the moment the Christian enters into the kingdom of grace and truth, he leaves his bonds behind; invigorated with a Divine strength he *purposes* and it *stands fast;* he *triumphs over himself;* is victorious over the *world*. . . . tramples upon the greatest *tyrants*—the powers of darkness. . . . 3. The next advantage from a good government is *plenty*. To secure this is sometimes beyond human power and policy. . . . In general it may be asserted that human laws should not interfere *too much*. . . . Everyone should be left at liberty, as far as possible, to choose his own way in pursuing his prosperity. . . . . Under the best systems of government there must remain many cases of want and distress; but in the kingdom of Jesus Christ there exists an *infinite plenty* for all the wants of the soul. . . . . 4. A tendency to *improvement in its social institutions* ought to accompany every well-ordered government. The best of those institutions are such as will be at once *permanent* and *progressive* by their intrinsic wisdom and excellence—by their adaptation to all the varying circumstances of the nation—by their power of providing for possible emergencies—they will gradually rise from *security* to *convenience*, and then exalt *convenience* into ornament—into just refinement and diffused illumination. . . . The gospel empire possesses within itself *interminable energies* and *tendencies* to benefit its subjects. . . . All those elysian images of prophecy which paint with so much beauty the latter days of the world, are nothing in their substantial fulfilment but the *impress* of Jesus Christ on the minds and manners of mankind—the image of Christianity embodied in society, and *righteousness* dwelling in the new-created universe. . . . 5. The fifth and last element is *stability;* this is the crown of all its other advantages. Nothing can be wanting to such a reign but that it should *last;* and this is what the text emphatically expresses.—*Robt. Hall.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—29.

DAVID'S THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER.

I. The bestowal of new honours should awaken a new sense of humility. The vessel that carries much sail and looks well above the water, should have

much ballast below the water-line. Only some heavy weight in the hold will give the needful steadiness to the ship. So the soul that receives from God many and great gifts, and is honoured by Him in a special manner, needs to be well ballasted, lest, being too highly exalted, it make shipwreck on the rock of pride. But if the man be in right relations to God, a sense of his unworthiness and of the increase of responsibility which each new gift and honour brings, will be to him what the iron and stone in the hold are to the full-rigged ship. With David, humility seems ever to have kept pace with the honour bestowed upon him by God. On the day when he was first brought before Saul as the deliverer of his people from the Philistine giant, his words and bearing show that he possessed that spirit of dependence upon God which is only found in those who have formed a lowly, and therefore a *right* estimate of themselves. We find no trace of any other spirit in him at any period of his history up to this crowning day of his life, when it was revealed to him that he was to be, not only a great and mighty monarch himself, but the ancestor of one who should rule a far more mighty and enduring empire. The manner in which he receives the revelation shows how well fitted he was to carry with a steady hand the overflowing cup of blessing held out to him.

II. Prayer for the fulfilment of Divine promises is a law of the kingdom of God. The promise that God gave to David concerning the Messiah was certain to be fulfilled; no power in the universe could prevent it. But many things are included in the certainty of its fulfilment, and prayer is one—the prayers of all the faithful who lived before the coming of Christ. The very longing of these souls for some more complete manifestation of God than they possessed was in itself a prophecy of it, and the assurance which they received of the coming blessing did by no means cause them to cease to pray for it, but gave them matter for supplication and a motive to continue in it. David here feels no inconsistency in asking that what God has promised shall come to pass, but links his prayer to the Divine word, and makes the promise the basis of the petition: "And now O Lord God, the *word that Thou hast spoken* concerning Thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and *do as Thou hast said.*" (Ver. 25.) "And now O Lord God, . . . Thy *words be true, and Thou hast promised* this goodness unto Thy servant: *Therefore* now let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant. (Verses 28 and 29.) So Daniel, when he understood that the time was drawing nigh for the return of the captives from Babylon "*set his face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplications, with fastings*" (Dan. ix. 3), and besought the Lord "*to hearken, and do, and defer not*" (ver. 19) to fulfil the promise which He had made by Jeremiah. And this not because Daniel had any misgivings concerning the faithfulness of Jehovah, but because that very faithfulness furnished him with the ground for his appeal. The same connection between Divine promises and human prayers is taught and practised in the dispensation of the New Testament. We know that the kingdom of God will "*come,*" and His will one day "*be done, as in heaven, so on earth,*" yet our Lord commands His disciples to pray constantly for this blessed result. Paul declares in Rom. x. 1, that his "*heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved,* and in the next chapter (ver. 26) says that it is the purpose and plan of God when *the fulness of the Gentiles be come in,* that "*all Israel shall be saved.*" Promise and petition are indissolubly linked together in the Divine economy, and as Dr. Chalmers remarks, "God's prophecies tell us what ought to be the subject of our prayers."

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 17. We see the fidelity of the Lord's prophet, which all His servants in the ministry should imitate, and that he is not ashamed to recall and recant what formerly he had said to David upon better ground and information from the Lord. Which should teach all men humbly to submit to truth, and quit error and not to stand upon their own credit, in maintaining what once they have professed without retractation.—*Guild.*

Here there presents itself to us a striking testimony of the reality of immediate divine revelations. David and Nathan united, according to their best knowledge and conscience, in a truly pious and holy work, and suddenly they renounce their cherished purpose, whose execution everything appeared to counsel. Why did they give up the noble intention? Not certainly of their own accord, but rather because God the Lord gave forth his voice regarding it, and interposed immediately his veto. And how should the living personal God, who has given to man the power of speech, not himself be able to *speak* to the children of men? No argument that can stand the test can be urged to the contrary.—*Krummacher.*

This revelation is an epoch-making one for David's inner life. It brought an entirely new element into his life, which as the Psalms show, moved him powerfully . . . David saw its meaning more and more clearly when he compared the promise with the Messianic idea which had been handed down from the fathers, and finally attained to perfect certainty by the further inner disclosures attached to this fundamental promise, with which he was occupied day and night. Psa. ii. and Psa. cx. afford special proof that such spiritual disclosures were really given to him. The Messianic hope, which had experienced no further development since Gen. xlix, now acquired much greater fulness and life. It had a substratum for further development, hallowed by God Himself, in the kingdom already in existence, and especially in David's personality and fortunes.—*Hengstenberg.*

The narrative shows that the Messianic sense of the prediction was not only understood, but that it filled David's heart with the warmest emotions of gratitude and delight. We found this remark partly on the elevated strain of David's thanksgiving . . . It is abrupt, impassioned, sublime. It is the language of one who has been raised to the same lofty pedestal as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the illustrious fathers of the nation, and made to occupy the same relation to the Seed of the Woman. Both in spirit and in sentiment there is a close correspondence between this thanksgiving and that of the Virgin Mary. Generally, the announcement was understood by the people as a prediction of the Messiah. Henceforth the Hope of Israel was known as the Son of David.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 25. There are two ways wherein David's faith works. I. *By believing the Divine word.* "Thou hast said." The object and ground of faith is the Divine saying—it is not upon thus saith a man, or thus saith a minister, nay, nor thus saith an angel. Divine faith can stand only upon a Divine testimony. If you have faith, then you have received the word, not as the word of man, but, as it is indeed, the Word of God. II. *Faith acts by pleading the accomplishment of the promise.* "Do as Thou hast said." It is the business of faith to put God to His word. 1. To plead upon the mercy that made the promise. 2. Upon the truth that is to make out the promise. 3. Upon the power of the Promiser. 4. Upon the Blood of the Covenant. 5. Upon the love of God to Christ.—*Erskine.*

Ver. 29. Blessed conviction! What matters it that our offspring be successful in business, or rise in the world, or form high connections, or accumulate great fortunes, if there be no grace in their hearts, enlightening, refining,

and enlarging their moral faculties; and what matters it though the world pity them, and scorn and hate them, if Christ be in them the hope of glory. *Blaikie.*

In what sense, I shall be asked, did David expect that his sons' kingdom would be a Divine and spiritual one? In what sense an earthly and magnificent one? I answer—he looked for no earthly magnificence which was not the manifestation of an inward and spiritual dominion; he feared no earthly magnificence, which was a manifestation of it.—*Maurice.*

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"Metheg-ammah."** This is a very obscure word, and has been very variously translated. **"Metheg"** is a **"bridle,"** and **"ammah"** is translated *mother* by Keil, Erdmann, Phillipson, and Wordsworth. Gesenius says this word is always used in a figurative sense as the head, or foundation of a thing, and agrees with the scholars above named in understanding it here to signify a capital or chief city. If so, *to take the bridle* can only mean to *subdue*, and this entire rendering is borne out by the parallel passage in 1 Chron. xviii. 1. Hävernick, Michaelis, Ewald, and others translate *arm-bridle*, but attach the same meaning to the words.

Ver 2. **"Moab."** Nothing is known of the cause or history of this war. Probably David's former friend (1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4) had been succeeded by a ruler of a different spirit. "Probably in this war occurred what is mentioned in 1 Chron. xi. 22 of Benaiah, one of David's heroes." (*Erdmann*). "Thus he fulfilled Balaam's prophecy in part" (Numb. xxiv. 17). (*Wordsworth.*) **"Measured them."** "This refers to a well-known practice of Eastern kings, to command their prisoners of war, particularly those who had greatly incensed the victors, to lie down on the ground, and then to put to death a certain portion of them, which was determined by lot, but most commonly by a measuring line. This usage was not, perhaps, usually practised by the people of God; but Jewish writers assert that the cause of this particular severity against Moab was their having massacred David's parents and family." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 3. **"Hadadezer."** Hadad was the sun-god of the Syrians, and the name signifies Hadad our help. **"Zobah."** A portion of Syria forming a separate kingdom in the time of Saul, David, and Solomon. See 1 Sam. xiv. 47. It is difficult to define its exact position and limits, but there seems to be grounds for regarding it as lying chiefly east of Coele-Syria, and extending thence north-east and east, towards, if not even to, the Euphrates. *Smith's Bib. Dictionary.* **"As he went."** That these words refer to Hadadezer and not to David seems evident from the use of the word *recover*. David had not possessed territory in this direction.

Ver. 4. **"Seven hundred horsemen."** As the word chariots does not appear in the original text, the actual reading here is 1700 horsemen, whereas in Chronicles 7000 horsemen and 1000 chariots are mentioned. Most scholars agree that the word "chariots" has been accidentally omitted, and the numeral for a thousand confounded with one denoting a hundred. For "in the plains of Syria seven thousand horsemen would be a much juster proportion to twenty thousand foot than seventeen hundred" (Keil, Thenius, etc.), and, further on, David is said to have lamed the *chariot-horses*, thereby implying the use of chariots in the engagement. **"Houghed,"** etc. The word translated chariot-horses denotes all animals used for riding. "The reason of this mutilation was, that horses being forbidden by the Mosaic constitution to the Hebrews, both in war and agriculture, it was of no use to keep them; and their neighbours, placing much dependence on cavalry, but having, for want of a native breed, to procure them by purchase, the greatest damage that could be done to them was to render their horses unserviceable in war." (*Jamieson*). "He reserved a hundred of them, not for war, but for a triumph or guard; whether or not this reservation was illegal and ungodly is not said. (*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 7. **"The servants of Hadadezer."** Either his **"*governors* and *vassal princes*"** (Keil) or **"*his immediate guard*."** (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 8 The cities here mentioned are unknown. **"Brass,"** rather, *copper*. "Some centuries before this copper was carried in quantities from Syria to Egypt." (*Bib. Commentary.*)

Ver. 9. **"Hamath."** The principal city of upper Syria in the valley of the Orontes.

Ver. 10. **"Joram."** Called *Hadoram* in Chronicles, and this is most likely the true reading, as Joram is an Israelitish name.

Ver. 13. "The Syrians in the valley of salt." As the valley of salt, near the Dead Sea, is at so great a distance from Syria, either *Edom* must be here substituted for *Aram* (here rendered Syrians), or the words "*and Edom*" must be inserted before "*the valley of salt.*" The sequel agrees with this reading. "The facts were probably these: Whilst David, or rather Israel, was entangled in the war with the Ammonites and Aramæns, the Edomites seized upon the opportunity which appeared to them a very favourable one to invade the land of Israel, and advanced as far as the southern extremity of the Dead Sea. As soon, therefore, as the Aramæans were defeated and subjugated, and the Israelitish army had returned from this war, David ordered it to march against the Edomites, and defeated them in the valley of salt." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 16. **"Jehoshaphat."** Nothing farther is known of this man. **"Recorder."** Literally, one who calls to remembrance, therefore most likely one who recorded the most important events of the nation. Keil and some others liken the office to that of the "*magister memoriæ* of the later Romans, or the *vaka nuvis* of the Persian court, who keeps a record of everything that takes place around the king, furnishes him with an account of all that occurs in his kingdom, places his *visé* upon all the king's commands, and keeps a special protocol of all these things."

Ver. 17. **"Zadok."** A descendant of Aaron's son Eleazar (1 Chron. v. 29-34, vi. 37, 38). **"Ahimelech."** It is strange to find this name in connection with Zadok in the priesthood, as both before and after this time *Abiathar* is himself mentioned as the priest (1 Sam. xxii. 20, etc.; 1 Kings i. 7, etc.). As the father of Abiathar was named Ahimelech some have proposed to *transpose* the names, but this would not solve the difficulty in 1 Chron. xxiv. 3, 6, 31. But the preferable solution appears to be that held by Keil, Wordsworth, Bertheau, and others, that Abiathar had a son of the same name as his (Abiathar's) father, who with Zadok assisted in the priestly duties. "The historian states," says Wordsworth, "that Zadok and Ahimelech were *priests*; not, as in our version, *the priests*. He supposes the reader to know the notorious fact that Abiathar was *the* priest. But he tells us, in addition to Abiathar the High Priest, Zadok and Ahimelech officiated as *priests*, just as we read of "the two sons of Eli *priests* of the Lord." (1 Sam. i. 3.) Abiathar and Ahimelech descended from *Ithamar*, Aaron's younger son. **"Scribe."** Probably the State-secretary.

Ver. 18. **"Benaiah."** A mighty warrior mentioned in chap. xxiii. 20. *Cherithites* and *Pelethites.* The first of these words is from a verb meaning *to cut down* or *exterminate*, and probably points to one duty of these men, viz., that of executioners. Pelethites is derived from a word signifying *to run, to hasten*, and intimates that they had to carry the royal orders to distant places. They were evidently David's body-guard. Some have derived the names from the Philistines, and from a Philistine tribe mentioned 1 Sam. xxx. 14, but the derivation seems far-fetched. **"Chief rulers."** The same word, used in 1 Kings iv. 5 and translated "principal officer," is afterwards explained as "*the king's friend.*" It probably signifies confidential advisers.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

DAVID'S CONQUESTS.

I. However long the conflict continues between the kingdom of God and the enemies of that kingdom, the final issue is not doubtful. The land of Palestine had long since been given by God to the descendants of Abraham, who then constituted the Church of God upon the earth. But from the days of Joshua until the reign of David, the struggle between the old inhabitants and the new had been continued with varying success. There had been dark days when Israel had been almost entirely subdued by her enemies, yet she had never lost her footing in the promised land; and now, under David, she saw herself the mistress of Jerusalem in the heart of the kingdom, and her foes subdued on every side. So it must and shall be in every contest of the Church of the Living God with those who oppose her. She will be subject to varying fortunes, and will sometimes appear to sink too low to rise again; but she shall eventually subdue all her enemies, and instead of the Church militant shall become the Church triumphant.

II. The victory of the kingdom of God depends upon the fulfilment of moral conditions. The success of the Philistines and the other nations against Israel had arisen from the moral degeneracy of the latter—from their neglect to fulfil the conditions upon which God had promised them a peaceful occupation of the land. And David now subdued them, and brought in a long period of rest, not because he was a mighty and skilful warrior, but because he was a man of faith

in the Unseen, and one who, on the whole, was sincere in his devotion and undivided in his service to God. It is because the nominal members of God's kingdom in the world have not fulfilled His conditions of success that the victory of the Cross is so long delayed and the Gospel makes so little progress among the nations. The earth has been given to Christ and His people, and the Great David will one day subdue all things to Himself and put an end to the conflict. But the "coming of the kingdom" is retarded by the want of faith in the so-called disciples of Christ, and by their apathy and worldliness—by their attempts to serve other gods beside Jehovah, and by their unwillingness to deny themselves for the cause they profess to have at heart.

III. However diversified the enemies of God may be, they are one in opposition to Him and to His rule. There are birds of prey wearing a variety of plumage and exhibiting other differences which show them to belong to different families. But they have one and the same instinct, and though they may sometimes be found fighting with each other, a desire after the carcase is common to all. The people mentioned here as warring against Israel were of different races, and inhabited different lands, and doubtless often warred against each other; but they were one in their hatred of Israel and opposition to David. They are typical of the enemies of the spiritual Israel and of those who oppose the progress of the kingdom of David's Son and Lord. Men who differ in all other points are found agreeing in this, and although, like Herod and Pilate, they may be opposed to each other on other matters, they will often be found, like them, uniting for this end.

IV. Yet, when the Church of God has temporal ascendancy and external prosperity some who care not for her principles will court her friendship. When David had subdued many nations the king of Hamath saluted and blessed him and so showed himself an exception to the general rule mentioned above. But this friendship for David was not founded on religious sympathy, but on hatred of a rival, and on policy. So the hatred between the enemies of God may sometimes for a time be more active than their enmity to His kingdom; but friendship arising from such a source will only last while the Church is in temporal prosperity. Like the multitudes who shouted "Hosanna!" during the brief moment of Christ's popularity, and melted away or joined in crying "Away with Him," in the hour of darkness, they will ever be found on the side which has the outward ascendancy.

V. Those who do the work of preparation and those who inherit and carry on their labour are one in the kingdom of God. The man who fells the tree, and digs up the roots, and plans out the ground for a city, is a co-worker with him who raises the walls and builds the palaces. Without the toil of the first the work of the latter could not be accomplished, but there is danger that, when the whole is finished, the part which the first labourer had in the work may be forgotten. David, in what we may believe was far less congenial work than the building of a temple would have been, made the building of that temple possible, and, by the establishment of an orderly system of Divine worship and service, educated the spiritual perceptions of the people, so that, when they possessed a more permanent and gorgeous house of God, they might understand that it was but the means to an end—only the outward and visible sign of an inward and unseen reality—of that worship of the heart and homage of the life, without which all other gifts and service are not only worthless in the sight of God, but an insult and an abomination. Let no worker for God be discouraged because he cannot do the completed work upon which he has set his heart, it is a law of the Divine kingdom that one man "sows and another reaps." The sowing is not the most joyous part of the work, but for this very reason it may be more honourable, and is that without which the other could not exist.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The transitions of the Bible, like those of actual life, are often singularly abrupt; that which now hurries us from the scene of elevated communion with Heaven, to the confused noise and dismal struggles of a battle-field, is peculiarly startling. . . . It is an instructive fact that the history of these wars occupy so small a portion of the Bible. A single verse is all that can be afforded to most of them. Had they been narrated at length, they would probably have formed a narrative that would have placed David, as a captain, on a level with Cyrus, Hannibal, or Alexander. It is one of the less noticed proofs of the inspiration of the Old Testament, that such dazzling transactions as these are passed over so briefly. There is no other history in the world where more space would be occupied in describing the carrying of an ark to its permanent resting-place than in narrating seven great military campaigns. It would be beyond the power of human nature to resist the temptation to describe great battles,—the story of which is always read with such interest, and which reflect so much earthly glory on one's nation.—*Blaikie.*

Vers. 15-18. In the minds of most readers of the Bible, the name of David, king of Israel, is associated mainly with military power, poetic genius, and personal piety; and only on the rarest occasions do we hear any reference made to his administrative ability. Yet in this last quality he was at least as remarkable as in any one of the others; and great injustice is done to him if we leave out of view the eminent services which he rendered to his country by the exercise of his government and his organising faculties. . . . More than Charlemagne did for Europe, or Alfred for England, David accomplished for the tribes of Israel.—*Taylor.*

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**And David said.**" This could not have occurred until David had reigned many years, seeing that Mephibosheth was only five years old when his father died, and was now a father himself. (See ver. 12 and chap. iv. 4.)

Ver. 3. "**The kindness of God.**" This expression is understood by some as "love and kindness shown in God, and for God's sake," (*Keil*); by others as "a kindness such as God Himself shows," (*Erdmann*); while Patrick takes the expression as a superlative form to denote simply *very great* kindness. Wordsworth paraphrases it "love for the Lord's sake, and in the Lord's sight, and according to the Lord's example."

Ver. 4. "**Lodebar.**" From chap. xvii. 27 we learn that this was beyond Jordan, near Mahanaim; it is generally thought to be identical with Lidbir or Debir, mentioned in Josh. xiii. 26. From the same source we learn that Machir was a man of position and wealth.

Ver. 7. "**Fear not.**" Mephibosheth's alarm may have arisen merely from "the simplicity and bashfulness of a youth who had lived in a nomad country, and who was awed by the splendour of a court," (*Jamieson*), or from the fear that David was about to follow the custom of oriental rulers, and slay all the representatives of the royal family which he had displaced. "**All the Land,**" etc. "It is evident from these words that the landed property belonging to Saul had either fallen to David as crown lands, or had been taken possession of by distant relations after the death of Saul." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 8. "**A dead dog.**" "Mephibosheth's early misfortunes threw a shade over his whole life, and his personal deformity—as is often the case when it has been the result of accident—seems to have exercised a depressing and depreciatory influence on his character (see also chap. xix. 26, 28)." (*Smith's Bib. Dict.*)

Ver. 10. "Although a daily guest at the royal table, Mephibosheth had to make provision as a royal prince for the maintenance of his own family and servants." (*Keil.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

DAVID AND MEPHIBOSHETH.

I. The merit of a dead parent is often a channel of blessing to the living child. Other things being equal, it is doubtless a blessing to descend from parents of gentle blood—from those who belong to the nobility of this world. Any member of such a family, if he be at all worthy of the name he bears, finds that name a fortune in itself in respect to the earthly and temporal advantages it confers upon him. But such a man does not monopolize all the honour and respect shown to children on account of their parentage. Men who cannot boast of a long pedigree, but who can rejoice in the greater honour of descending from the morally great, have often found the goodness of their departed father or mother bearing fruit for them, their sons and daughters, long after their parents have left the world. It is a principle which has received a Divine sanction, for God who declares that He visits the sins of the fathers upon the children (Exod. xx 5), has, both by word and deed, repeatedly blessed the children for the father's sake. (Gen. xxvi. 4, 5, xxviii. 13, etc.). In the case of Mephibosheth, the principle had not until now fully asserted itself. The son of one whose nature was as noble as his birth was princely, and whose heroic submission to the Divine will and devoted friendship have been very rarely equalled and never surpassed, Mephibosheth seems hitherto to have come sadly short of what was due to him as the sole surviving heir of Jonathan. Those who protected his helpless infancy and sheltered him in his crippled manhood may have been in part actuated by regard for his father, but none owed him so much as David, who now at last discharges the debt and makes his friend's child feel that, after all, God had not forgotten to care for the son of a faithful servant.

II. True friendship rejoices to find a child to receive the gratitude which it would have rendered to the dead father. If Jonathan had lived until this day of David's exaltation, he would have been satisfied to be David's friend—to be *next unto* him (1 Sam. xxiii. 17) in the kingdom of Israel, and David would have known how to estimate such unselfish loyalty and must have regarded such a friend with profound and admiring gratitude. We may be sure that nothing would have been wanting on David's side which could give expression to the feelings which must have filled his soul. But the calamity which had deprived Mephibosheth of his father had removed David's beloved friend, and all that he could now do was to put the son in the father's place. This he did so far as it was possible. He could not rejoice in the presence of Jonathan at his table, but Mephibosheth should take his place and keep his father's memory green in the king's heart. None who is truly grateful to a friend for favours in the past will make that friend's death an excuse for neglecting to acknowledge and to repay the debt of gratitude. A true man will feel it his duty and his delight to place any who belong to his benefactor in that benefactor's place, and to do that relatively which he can no longer do personally.

III. Elevation to power should be embraced as a God-given opportunity for repaying past favours. When David first received kindly notice from Jonathan he was but an unknown youth who could only give grateful love in return for the prince's favour. And as the years rolled on and he became more known only to be more in need of a true friend, Jonathan's brotherly faithfulness was often his only source of human counsel and cheer. But now times had changed, and David was on the throne of Israel, while Jonathan's child was an exile and apparently dependent upon the bounty of others, and so an opportunity was given to the king to testify his grateful remembrance of past kindnesses.

It would be well if all men who rise from obscurity to fame and power were to make their elevation a like opportunity of remembering those who befriended them in their days of adversity, and of testifying their gratitude to them. If they neglect to do this, they omit to perform a most sacred duty, and show themselves wanting in one of the main elements of a noble disposition.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

This fragment of history may be looked upon in two lights. I. *As supplying a fine illustration of human friendship.* . . . Jonathan was still fresh in the heart of David. Death cannot *really* deprive us of our friends after all. Memory holds them, enshrines them, presses them to the heart, makes them more real to us after death than before. . . . Friendship gives a common interest: what our friend loves, we love; His children in a sense are ours. . . . II. *As a faint image of Divine love to the world.* . . . We are warranted I presume, to use facts in human history, as Jesus used the waving cornfields, etc. . . . to illustrate spiritual and Divine facts. Besides, *the good in man is a Divine emanation*, and the best means *of giving an idea of God.* I see more of the Eternal in a true kindness of a holy man—such kindness as David now displays—than in any part of material nature . . . I feel justified therefore, in looking upon David's conduct towards Mephibosheth as serving to *illustrate God's conduct towards our ruined world.* . . . 1. *The kindness was unsought.* The son of Jonathan did not make any application. . . . Did the world seek the gift of God? . . . 2. The kindness was in consideration of someone else. It was "for Jonathan's sake." . . . Christ is not the *cause* of God's love, but He is the channel. . . . 3. *The results of the kindness are illustrative of the Divine. It found out Mephibosheth.* . . . Christ came to seek and to save. . . . The apostles were sent out in search of God's objects of love. . . . God's love searches out men. Providence, conscience, and the Gospel, are His messengers. . . . *It restored to him his patrimonial inheritance.* . . . God's love restores us to our lost possessions. Salvation is "paradise regained" etc. *It exalted to distinguished honours.* "And thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." "If any man hear my voice, I will come in unto him," etc.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

Ver. 1. Good men should *seek* opportunities of doing good. *The liberal deviseth liberal things* (Isa. xxxii. 8.) For the most proper objects of our kindness and charity are such as will not be frequently met with without inquiry. The most necessitous are the least clamorous. David had too long forgotten his obligations to Jonathan, but now, at length, they are brought to his mind. It is good sometimes to bethink ourselves whether there be any promises or engagements that we have neglected to make good; better do it late than never.—*Henry.*

We must also see where Jesus our fast friend hath any receivers; that since our goodness extendeth not to Him, we may show Him kindness in His people, who are His seed and prolong His days upon earth. (Isa. liii. 10, Psa. xvi. 3.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 8. Humiliation is a right use of God's affliction. What if he was born great? If the sin of his grandfather hath lost his estate, and the hand of his nurse hath deformed and disabled his person, he now forgets what he was, and calls himself worse than he is, "a dog." Yet, "a living dog is better than a dead lion." There is dignity and comfort in life; Mephibosheth is therefore a dead dog unto David. It is not for us to nourish the same spirits in our adverse estate, that we found in our highest prosperity. What use have we made of God's hand, if we be not the lower with our fall? God intends we should carry our cross, not make a fire of it to warm us: it is no bearing up our sails

in a tempest. Good David cannot disesteem Mephibosheth ever the more for disparaging himself; he loves and honours this humility in the son of Jonathan. There is no more certain way to glory and advancement, than a lowly dejection of ourselves.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 13. Here also we see that the "sure mercies of David" overflowed on the faithful and humble-minded in the family of Saul. Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, was admitted to partake in the royal prerogatives of David's son, and to sit continually at David's table; and so it will be with the Jews; when they are Mephibosheths in faith and humility, they will be Mephibosheths in honour, they will be admitted to share in the glory of the True David in the Church militant here and triumphant hereafter.—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 2. "**Nahash.**" This may be the same Nahash mentioned in 1 Sam. xi.; but as this was probably forty years after the event there recorded, it is more likely a son of the same name. "**As his father showed kindness.**" What this kindness was, or when shown is nowhere recorded; most likely some friendly act in the days of David's exile.

Ver. 3. "**The city.**" Rabbah, or Rabbath-Ammon the capital city, which was a city of much importance from these days until the fourth century. Its position and defences would make it necessary that an enemy proposing to besiege it should examine it from within. The remains of this city which still exist are among the most remarkable in Syria; and although most of the buildings are said to be Roman, the citidel is said to be much more ancient, and Mr. Oliphant (Land of Gilead) refers some of the fortifications to the days of David. "**Shaved off,**" etc. "Cutting off a person's beard is regarded by the Arabs as an indignity quite equal to flogging and branding among ourselves. Many would rather die than have their beards shaved off. Niebuhr relates a similar occurrence as having taken place in modern times. In the year 1764, a pretender to the Persian throne, named *Kerim Khan*, sent ambassadors to the prince of Bendervigk, on the Persian gulf, to demand tribute of him; but he in return cut off the ambassador's beards. *Kerim Khan* was so enraged at this, that he made war upon the prince and took the city." (*Keil*) "The Israelites, except the priests, wore no breeches; so much the grosser, therefore, was the second insult." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 6. "**Beth-rehob.**" Probably identical with the present *Rubaibeh*, about twenty-five miles N.E. of Damascus. "**Tobah,**" see on chap. viii. 3. "**King Maacha,**" rather, "**king of Maacha.**" A territory on the northern border of Bashan, on the south-west declivity of Hermon. (Deut. iii. 14.) "**Ish-tob.**" Rather *the men of Tob*, a region near the Ammonite territory, where Jephthah took refuge. (Judges xi. 5.) Its exact location cannot be fixed. **Twenty thousand footmen.**" The account of the composition of the forces differs here from that in Chronicles, no chariots being here mentioned. There are copyists' errors in both texts. For the Syrian troops consisted neither of footmen alone, nor of chariots and horsemen alone, but of infantry, cavalry, and war chariots, as is evident, not only from chap. viii. 4, and 1 Chron. xviii. 4, but also from the close of our narrative." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 8. "Here the position of the Syrians *in the field, i.e.*, on the broad plain of Medeba, is clearly distinguished from the Ammonites before the city, so that the position of Joab's army is clear. He could (see ver. 9) be attacked both in front and rear." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 12. "**The cities of our God.**" "Joab and Abishai were about to fight, in order that Jehovah's possessions might not fall into the hands of the heathen, and become subject to their gods." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 13. "**They fled.**" "**As often happens for those that fight for pay alone, and not for the cause.**" (*Grotius.*)

Ver. 14. "**Joab returned.**" As may be inferred from chap. xi. 1, because it was too late in the season to besiege Rabbah. "Or also because the Syrians were not sufficiently broken, or he had not the materials for a siege." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 16. "Hadarezer." (See on chap. viii. 3.) **"The river."** The Euphrates. This king had tributaries in Mesopotamia. (See chap. viii. 3.) **"Helam."** The locality of this place is not known. "As this is the same battle that, according to 1 Chron. xviii. 3, was fought at Hamath, it must be across the Jordan, (see ver. 17), not on the Euphrates, but further west than Hamath." (*Erdmann.*) For Hamath, see chap. viii. 9.

Ver. 18. "Seven hundred chariots," etc. (See Keil's remark at the close of ver. 6.) He and other scholars consider that in this chapter we have simply a more circumstantial account of the war of which the result is given in chap. viii. In support of this view it is urged that in the former chapter David is said to have subdued the Syrians and the children of Ammon, and there is nothing said here of a revolt from an authority previously acquired, but the circumstances which led to the subjugation of Ammon are here fully related on account of its connection with the death of Uriah in the next chapter.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

DAVID AND THE AMMONITES.

I. The wisdom and virtues of the parent are not necessarily found in the child. Although we have no further information concerning the father of Hanun than that which is furnished by the words of David, they are sufficient to show that he was a far wiser and better man than his son. It is reasonable to suppose that he showed kindness to David at that period in David's life when nothing but a kindly disposition could have prompted him to the deed—when the present king of Israel was not in a position either to resent an insult or reward a service rendered. We may fairly then assume that this former king of the Ammonites was a man whose character was above the level of the monarchs by whom he was surrounded, and it is possible that, as a descendant of Lot, he cherished some regard for the nation of Israel, and some reverence for Israel's God. But the conduct of his son is a proof of the painful truth that neither wisdom nor moral worth are hereditary. If Hanun had been only politically wise he would have given David's ambassadors a different reception. If goodwill to his father's old ally did not move him to continue the friendship, a wise man would have seen it would be politic to do so. For David was now a king himself, and a king whom it was worth while to propitiate. When, therefore, Hanun not merely cast from him an opportunity of strengthening his kingdom by alliance with David, but added great insult to his rejection, he showed himself as weak as he was wicked, and an unworthy son of a worthy parent.

II. Those who are in the wrong are often the first to strike the blow which leads to war. It does not appear that David took any steps to avenge the insult offered to himself and to his country—he probably felt he could afford to let it pass, and was willing to leave the Ammonites and their king in the hand of God. But Hanun and his followers measured David by their own standard, and concluding that he would be filled with feelings of revenge, hastened to follow up their first act of defiance by another, which compelled David to take action against them. Thus they forced upon Israel the battle which ended in their own destruction, for David would have failed in his duty had he not have now dealt out retribution. This principal is ever in operation in the various spheres of human life. Even in the play-ground the boy who is in the wrong is often more eager than the companion whom he has offended to settle the dispute by blows, and ascending to the unequal contest which rebellious man wages with his Maker, we find that all the defiance and active insolence is on the side of the offending human creature, and all the long-suffering and forbearance on that of the God against whom he has sinned. Let all in such case beware, lest, like these Ammonites, they force the sword of retribution to descend upon them.

III. If those who are in the wrong are bold, much more should those who are in the right show courage and determination. These Syrians and Ammonites were engaged in an unjust war—they had no possible excuse for the attack they made upon Israel, and therefore they could have had no conviction of being in the right to sustain them. Yet they came to the contest with bold hearts—venturing their liberties and their lives in a wrong cause. As we have before had occasion to notice, men will be brave in trying to advance wrong as well as in defending what is right. But seeing that they who are engaged in fighting for the righteous cause have God and conscience on their side, it behoves them at all times to equal, if not to surpass, their opponents in courage and devotion. Joab could here draw inspiration from the certainty that he was fighting for God in fighting against the heathen, and this thought enabled him to be of good cheer, and leave the issue in God's hands. Although he was not a true servant of God, he was at this time engaged in a service for God's people, and the consciousness of this seems to have lifted him for a time above his ordinary frame of mind, and filled him with a real religious devotion. If *Joab* could be thus animated and strengthened, surely no truly godly man ought to fear or falter in the day of righteous conflict.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 3. It is hard for a wicked heart to think well of any other; because it can think none better than itself and knows itself evil.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 5. 1. We must beware of casting pearls before swine (ver. 2). The Ammonites must have been known to David as a cruel and barbarous people. 2. Nothing is so offensive as a wanton insult in return for respect and kindness. 3. The gravest men are sensitive to ridicule of their personal appearance. 4. All persons of noble nature are considerate of the feelings of others. 5. Time heals many ills.—*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 6. It is one of the mad principles of wickedness, that it is a weakness to relent, and rather to die than yield. Even ill causes, once undertaken, must be upheld, although with blood; whereas the gracious heart, finding his own mistaking, doth not only remit of an ungrounded displeasure, but studies to be revenged of itself, and to give satisfaction to the offended.—*Bp. Hall.*

That is the way with an evil conscience; it flees before it is hunted. (Job xv. 20.)—*Cramer.*

Ver. 12. That soldier can never answer it to God, that strikes not more as a justiciar, than as an enemy; neither doth he content himself with his own courage, but he animates others. The tongue of a commander fights more than his hand. It is enough for private men to exercise what life and limbs they have: a good leader must, out of his own abundance, put life and spirits into all others: if a lion lead sheep into the field, there is hope of victory. Lastly, when he hath done his best, he resolves to depend upon God for the issue, not trusting to his sword, or his bow, but to the providence of the Almighty, for success, as a man religiously awful, and awfully confident, while there should be no want in their own endeavours. He knew well that the race was not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; therefore he looks up above the hills whence cometh his salvation. All valour is cowardice to that which is built upon religion.—*Bp. Hall.*

Joab was a selfish, unscrupulous, unprincipled man; yet in entering upon a perilous battle he talks piously. So do almost all civil rulers and generals in any great emergency; not only because they know that the people feel their dependence upon God, but because in the hour of trial they feel it them-

selves. Such language under such circumstances does not clearly prove one to be devout, or to be hypocritical; it expresses a feeling which may be genuine, though transient and superficial.—*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*

I. Courage is an essential characteristic of a good soldier—not a savage ferocious violence; not a foolhardy insensibility of danger, or headstrong rashness to rush into it; not the fury of inflamed passions broke loose from the government of reason; but calm deliberate rational courage; a steady, judicious, thoughtful fortitude; the courage of a man, and not of a tiger. . . . This will render men vigilant and cautious against surprises, prudent and deliberate in concerting their measures, and steady and resolute in executing them. . . . II. It is of great importance to excite and keep up courage in such an expedition that we should be fully satisfied that we engage in a righteous cause—and in a cause of great moment; for we cannot prosecute a *suspected*, or *wicked* scheme which our own minds condemn, but with hesitation and timorous apprehensions; and we cannot engage with spirit and resolution in a *trifling* scheme, from which we can expect no consequences worth our vigorous pursuit. . . . The consideration of the justness and importance of the cause may also encourage hope that the Lord of Hosts will espouse it, and render its guardians successful. The event, however, is in His hands as the closing words of the text suggest. They may be looked upon in various views; as 1. The language of uncertainty and modesty. . . . Such language becomes us in all our undertakings; it sounds creature-like, and God approves of such self-diffident humility. . . . 2. It may be expressive of a firm persuasion that the event of war entirely depends upon the providence of God. *q.d.* Let us do our best; but after all, let us be sensible, that the success does not depend upon us. . . . It is no great exploit of faith to believe this; it is but a small advance upon atheism and downright infidelity. . . . 3. It may express an humble submission to the disposal of providence, let the event turn out as it would we have not the disposal of the event, nor do we know what it will be; but Jehovah knows and that is enough. . . 4. These words, in their connection, may intimate, that, let the event be what it will, it will afford us satisfaction to think that we have done the best we could. *q.d.* We cannot command success: but let us do all in our power to obtain it, and we have reason to hope we shall not be disappointed; but if it should please God to render all our endeavours vain, still we shall have the generous pleasure to reflect, that we have not been accessory to the ruin of our country, but have done all we could for its deliverance.—*From a sermon by President Davies of New Jersey, preached on the invasion of British America by the French, 1755.*

Ver. 13. Joab provided for the worst, and put the case that the Syrians or Ammonites might prove too strong for him; but he proved too strong for them both. We do not hinder our successes by preparing for disappointment.—(*Henry*).

Ver. 1–19. One injustice produces another, and drags men on irretardably to destruction by the resulting chain of sins and injustices.—(*Lange's Commentary*).

Our Psalter contains several songs which betray an undeniable reference to the last wars and victories of David. . . . To these belong, in the first place the sixtieth . . . in which he begins by looking back on the invasion of the Syrians, in which his army had to lament sorrowful losses, and on all the terrors of war which had spread over the land. "O God, Thou hast cast us off, etc. . . . Thou hast given a banner, etc. . . . (*i.e.*, Thou didst give them deliverance, and didst raise up that before them like an encouraging banner)." . . . He concludes with "God hath spoken in His holiness" (glorious promises has He given to me); "therefore" (*i.e.*

on the ground of them) "I will rejoice: I will divide" (to Israel) "Shechem" (the land on this side of Jordan), and mete out the valley of Succoth" (the land on the farthest side of Jordan). The whole land David regards as his possession. But why does he name only these two places? He names them as denoting the two portions of the land, with a retrospective reference to the patriarch Jacob, who, after his return from Mesopotamia, settled first in Succoth, and then afterwards in Shechem, and there built an altar, thus foreshadowing the taking possession of the land at a later period.

The twentieth Psalm is a Davidic war song, belonging to the same days, . . . also the forty-fourth, and we have in the sixty-eighth Psalm, an animated song of triumph, which has reference, with its whole contents, to the issue, so glorious for Israel, of that most fearful of all their wars, the Syro-Ammonitish. The Psalmist begins it with joyful expressions of praise to Jehovah as the Protector of the righteous, and the inflexible Judge of the wicked. Then he recalls to remembrance the mighty deeds by which God had made himself glorious to Israel during their marchings in the wilderness, and the peaceful days which he had granted to his people after the conquest of Canaan till the erection of the tabernacle on Mount Zion. After a description of the glory of God, who, as the King of all kings sat enthroned in majesty on His holy hill of Zion, and had again shown himself, in the subjugation of all the enemies of His people, that He was the God of Israel, the Psalmist describes the festal procession in which the holy thing, the ark of the covenant, which had accompanied the army into the field during the Ammonitish war, was brought back again to Jerusalem. He names several tribes, among others those of Benjamin and Judah, Zebulun and Naphtali, which took part in this procession, as representatives of the whole nation. Then he sees in spirit the veil raised from the most distant future, and all the nations of the earth bending under the sceptre of the God of Israel. Then the song becomes Messianic, and closes with these words: "Ascribe ye strength unto God: His excellency is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds. O God, Thou art terrible out of Thy holy places: the God of Israel is He that giveth strength and power unto His people. Blessed be God!"—(*Krummacher*).

CHAPTER XI.

Critical and Expository Notes. Ver 1. "**After the year,**" etc., rather, *at the return of the year, i.e.*, in the spring when kings were accustomed to begin military operations. "**His servants,**" the military chieftans about his person. "**All Israel,**" *i.e.*, the whole army. "**The children of Ammon.**" "It was usual, when some strong point was attacked, to ravage the land far and near by incursion parties." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 2. "**In an eveningtide,**" etc. When the mid-day rest was over, and noon was past. "**Walked upon the roof.**" This was an eastern custom, and the place and hour often used for religious meditation. "**Saw a woman,**" etc. Either at the well in the court-yard of her house or, as some suggest, in her chamber, the casements being open. "In either case, the place was private, visible only from a neighbouring roof; and in the East people refrain from looking down from a roof into neighbouring courts, so that it is an unfounded suggestion that Bathsheba was purposely bathing in an exposed place in order to attract the king's gaze." (*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 3. "**Bathsheba.**" . . "**Eliam.**" In 1 Chron. iii. 5, she is called Bathshua, daughter of Ammiel. "Ammiel has the same meaning as Eliam, and is, indeed, the same word, its compound parts being inverted, and means "*God's people.*" (*Wordsworth.*) From 2 Sam. xxiii. 34, where Eliam is called the son of Ahithophel, it is supposed by some that Bathsheba was the grand-daughter of David's counsellor, and that this may explain his adherence to Absalom. "**Uriah the Hittite.**" One of David's heroes. The Hittites were dwelling in Palestine, as far back as the days of Abraham. (Gen. xv. 20, xxiii. 7.)

Ver. 4. "David sent," etc. "David had probably hoped that she was unmarried, but now that his passion was inflamed the knowledge that she was a wife did not deter him from his purpose." (*Wordsworth.*) "The narrative leads us to infer that Bathsheba came and submitted herself to David without opposition. She was moved doubtless by vanity and ambition in not venturing to refuse the demand of the *king*." (*Erdmann.*) **"For she was purified,"** etc. Rather, *when she was purified, etc., she returned.* (See Lev. xv. 18.)

Ver. 5. "And sent and told David." Adultery was punishable with death. "This involved an appeal to him to take the necessary steps to avert the evil consequences of the sin." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 8. "Wash thy feet," etc. "These words contained an intimation that he was to go to his own home." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 9. "Slept at the door," etc. "In the guard room (1 Kings xiv. 27, 28) with the royal court officials or the bodyguard. It is possible that he did this merely out of zeal of service, but also his suspicions may have been already aroused, and he may have heard something of the affair with Bathsheba." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 11. "The ark," etc. This seems to indicate that the ark had accompanied the army. **"As thou livest,"** etc. Literally, *by thy life and the life of thy soul.* "This is not a tautology, but a strengthening of the oath by a repetition of the thought." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 16. "When Joab observed," literally, *watched.* "We must understand from this a procedure different from the usual siege, a nearer approach, which challenged the warriors in the city to a sally." (*Bunsen.*)

Ver. 17. "And Uriah the Hittite died also." "Joab could foresee that this would happen from the dangerousness of the post. In becoming the instrument of David's murderous artifice, Joab needed not to know the ground of the order. As obedient servant of the king, he carried out the order unhesitatingly, inasmuch as it was an order of the commander of the *army* in relation to a soldier who might have committed some grave offence against him, and whose seemingly accidental death might be desired by him for special reasons." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 20. "If so be that the king's wrath," etc. "Joab assumed that David might express his displeasure at the fact that Joab had sacrificed a number of his warriors by approaching close to the wall, if such should be the case, to announce Uriah's death to the king, for the purpose of mitigating his wrath." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 27. "When the mourning was past," etc. The usual mourning of the Israelites lasted seven days. (Gen. i. 10; 1 Sam. xxxi. 13.) It is not known whether it was longer in the case of widowhood. It is obvious that David would make Bathsheba his wife as early as possible.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

David's Fall.

I. Times of prosperity and inactivity are times of special temptation. In all the days of David's adversity he maintained an unsullied reputation. In this day of his prosperity he was guilty of a series of the blackest crimes. Men by great successes in life become a special mark for the great enemy of the race, and the more so in proportion as they have hitherto been loyal to God and goodness. At such times the path of active duty is the least likely to lead into temptation. If David had been at this time at the head of his army it is likely he would have escaped this dark stain upon his life, for plenty of work is a preventive of certain kinds of sin. While a brook is in motion its waters are pure, but if their flow is stopped they become stagnant; so there are men who cannot pass from a life of activity to one of repose without degenerating in character. It seems as though David, with all his intense devotion and deep religious emotion, was of this class. He had been on the throne for a considerable number of years, but until now had probably had little leisure, and the constant demands upon his energies had kept the arrows of the tempter from

piercing the weak place in his armour. How much safer he would have been in the thickest of the fight before Rabbath-Ammon than upon his house-top in Jerusalem.

II. Even good men have evil tendencies, of whose strength they have no conception. A vessel filled with gunpowder looks very trim, and clean, and safe, but the black powder is there in the hold, only needing a single spark to make its power felt. A lake seems filled with the purest water, but a stone cast into it will stir up the mud at the bottom and change it into a thick and turbid pool. A tendency to a certain disease may lie dormant for years in the constitution, and suddenly circumstances may favour its rapid development, and it may carry off its victim in a few days. So is it with the human soul. If any human eye had marked David as he sought his roof on this day, could they have dreamedth at there were the possibilities of such a fall within him? Had he any conception himself of the strength of his passion, and the weakness of his will on the side of righteousness?

III. If sin is not resisted when in the heart it will sooner or later become manifest in the life. When the sensual thought in relation to Bathsheba entered David's heart he did not bid it depart, but dallied with it until even the knowledge that she was the wife of another seemed no obstacle to him. Even the best man while in this world needs ever to stand sentinel over his inner life, lest before he is aware a sinful desire lay hold of him and speedily pass from the region of thought into that of action. For sin never remains hidden in the soul unless it is fought and conquered there. If the spring be not cleansed the streams must reveal the fact, and if the root be not good the fruit must betray it.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. This entire campaign, with the siege of a capital, and the slaying of thousands, interests us now only as the occasion of David's series of great sins. And in truth the striking excellencies or faults of one great and good man, when permanently recorded and widely read, become more important to the welfare of the human race than the overthrow of cities or kingdoms.—*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*

While Joab is busy laying siege to Rabbah, Satan is to David, and far sooner prevailed.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 2. There can be no safety to that soul, where the senses are let loose. He can never keep his covenant with God, that makes not a covenant with his eyes.—*Bp. Hall.*

David had once prayed, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;" and should have still continued his suit: that as he might keep a door in God's house, so God would keep the doors and windows of his,—those otherwise windows of wickedness, and loopholes of lust, the eyes; through which the old serpent easily windeth himself into the heart, and maketh himself master of the whole man. This made good Job to step from a prayer into a vow (Job xxxi. 1). Yea, from a vow to an imprecation (ver. 7.), as knowing the danger of irregular glancing, or inordinate gazing.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 3. David should rather have taken an antidote of mortification, before the venom of lust had got to the vitals. But it is hard for him who hath fallen down the ladder of hell for a round or two, to stop or step back till he come to the bottom, without extraordinary help from the hand of Heaven. Can a man commit one sin more, and but one sin more?—*Trapp.*

Ver. 4. Had Bathsheba been mindful of her matrimonial fidelity, perhaps

David had been soon checked in his inordinate desire; her facility furthers the sin. The first motioner of evil is most faulty; but as in quarrels, so in offences, the second blow (which is the consent) makes the fray. Sin is not acted alone; if but one party be wise, both escape. It is no excuse to say, I was tempted, though by the great, though by the holy and learned: almost all sinners are misled by that transformed angel of light. The action is that we must regard, not the person. Let the mover be never so glorious, if he stir us to evil, he must be entertained with defiance.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 15. David hath forgotten that himself was in like sort betrayed in his master's intention, upon the dowry of the Philistines' foreskins. I fear to ask, who ever noted so foul a plot in David's rejected predecessor? Uriah must be the messenger of his own death, Joab must be a traitor to his friend, the host of God must shamefully turn their backs upon the Ammonites, all that Israelitish blood must be shed, that murder must be seconded with dissimulation: and all this to hide one adultery. O God, thou hadst never suffered so dear a favourite of thine to fall so fearfully, if thou hadst not meant to make him an universal example to mankind, of not presuming, of not despairing. How can we presume of not sinning, or despair for sinning, when we find so great a saint thus fallen, thus risen!—*Bp. Hall.*

It is a sign of the irresistible power of conscience, and an involuntary self-condemnation, when a man seeks in every way to conceal his sin from men, but to extenuate and justify it before God, and on the other hand unwillingness to make confession has its deepest ground in the pride of the human heart, which increases in proportion as the man becomes involved in sin, and the evil in him develops itself from the slightest beginnings into a power that exercises dominion over the whole inner life. "Whosoever commits sin, he is the servant of sin."—*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 11. Even the best actions are not always seasonable, much less the indifferent. He that ever takes liberty to do what he may, shall offend no less than he that sometimes takes liberty to do what he may not.

If anything, the ark of God is fittest to lead our tunes; according as that is either distressed, or prospereth, should we frame our mirth or mourning. To dwell in ceiled houses, while the temple lies waste, is the ground of God's just quarrel.—*Bp. Hall.*

Vers. 1–27. It has been said, "But such a sin is so unlike David's character." Doubtless it was, on the theory that David was a character mingled of good and evil. But on David's own theory, that he was an utterly weak person without the help of God, the act is perfectly like David. It is David's self. It is what David would naturally do when he had left hold of God. Had he left hold of God in the wilderness he would have become a mere robber-chieftain. He does leave hold of God in his palace of Zion, and he becomes a mere Eastern despot.—*Kingsley.*

Let it be noted that when Satan comes to a man, he makes his appeal to that particular part of his nature where passion is strongest and principle is weakest. Now in David what that was might be very easily discovered. From an early period of his career, he had been especially susceptible in the very matter in which now he fell. This is evident from his marriage of Abigail, and also from the great latitude in which he allowed himself, after his settlement in Jerusalem, in respect to his harem. Polygamy, though not forbidden by the Mosaic law, was regulated and discouraged; but David proceeded as if it had been a perfectly warrantable and legitimate thing, and this conduct on his part undoubtedly tended to weaken his impression of the sanctity of marriage. That sense of delicacy and chastity, which has such a purifying and preserving influence on the life, could not flourish side by side with the polygamy in which he

permitted himself; and so, though he thought not of it at the time, his taking of many wives to himself prepared the way for the revolting iniquity which he committed. Here, then, in the moral weakness which constant prosperity had created, in the opportunity which idleness afforded to temptation, and in the blunted sensibility which polygamy had superinduced, we see how David was so easily overcome.

But it may be asked, How can you account for such enormous iniquity in such a man as we have seen that David was? To this I answer, that we may explain it by the absence for the time being of that restraining influence which his better nature was wont to exercise over his life. Passion had dethroned conscience; and then, owing to the intensity of his character, and the general greatness of the man, his sins became as much blacker than those of others, as his good qualities were greater than theirs. In every good man there are still two natures striving for the mastery. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." The new nature is generally in the ascendant, but sometimes the old evil nature will re-assert its supremacy, and the effect of this temporary revolution will be determined by the temperament and characteristics of the individual. Now there are some men in whom everything is on a large scale. When their good nature is uppermost, they overtop all others in holiness; but if, unhappily, they should be thrown off their guard, and the old man should gain the mastery, some dreadful wickedness may be expected. This is all the more likely to be the case if the quality of intensity be added to their greatness; for a man with such a temperament is never anything by half. But it was just thus with David. He was a man of great intensity and pre-eminent energy. He was in every respect above ordinary men; and so when, for the time, the fleshly nature was the stronger within him, the sins which he committed were as much greater than those of common men, as in other circumstances his excellencies were nobler than theirs. We often make great mistakes in judging of the characters of others, because we ignore all these considerations; and many well-conducted persons among us get great credit for their good moral character, while the truth is that they are blameless not so much because they have higher-toned principles than others, as because they have feeble, timid natures, that are too cautious or too weak to let them go very far either into holiness or into sin. But David was not one of these. Everything about him was intense; and hence, when he sinned, he did it in such a way as to make well-nigh the most hardened shudder. In all this, observe, I am not extenuating David's guilt. It is one thing to explain, it is another thing to excuse. A man of David's nature ought to be more peculiarly on his guard than other men. The express train, dashing along at furious speed, will do more mischief if it runs off the line than the slow-going horse-car in our city streets. Everyone understands that; but everyone demands, in consequence, that the driver of the one shall be proportionately more watchful than that of the other. Now with such a nature as David had, and knew that he had, he ought to have been supremely on his guard, while again the privileges which he had received from God rendered it both easy and practicable for him to be vigilant.—*Taylor.*

Thus far the story belongs to the usual crimes of an Eastern despot. Detestable as was the double guilt of this dark story, we must still remember that David was not an Alfred or a Saint Louis. He was an Eastern king, exposed to all the temptations of a king of Ammon or Damascus then—of a sultan of Bagdad or Constantinople in modern times. What follows, however, could have been found nowhere in the ancient world, but in the Jewish monarchy.—*Stanley.*

For a king to take the wife of a poor man—how light a fault may this have

appeared to one with the power and privileges which David possessed. Supposing there was a fixed law against adultery, did this law apply to the ruler of the land? Was he not in some sense above law? Such are the arguments and sophistries which would occur to one who was wrestling with his conscience either to give him leave to commit a wrong, or not to torment him for it when it was done. And then, if the husband of this woman stood in the way of the full gratification of his purpose, or of the concealment of it, was there anything strange that he, who was exposing thousands of his subjects to the chances of battle and death, should expose this one? Why was his life more precious than that of any other Israelite? Was it precious simply because it was so convenient to his master than he should lose it? And so the deeds were done. . . . And David, no doubt, performed all his official tasks as before, went daily to the services of the tabernacle, was probably most severe in enforcing punishment upon all wrong doers.—*Maurice.*

Ver. 27. Such is the solemn qualification which the Holy Scriptures append to a record of successful wickedness. . . . From the moment when a lawless desire first planted itself in David's heart, till the full completion of that desire in the sinful act and its consequences, there had not been one single impediment in the way of his gratification which had not been easily, triumphantly surmounted; not one misgiving of conscience obstinately importunate; not one agent in the crime reluctant or inaccessible to persuasion; not one adverse circumstance to interfere with the exact order of the meditated plan. . . . "*But* the thing displeased the Lord." This is the point of contrast between the text and its immediate context; between the smooth and easy course of king David's transgression, and the few emphatic words which close the record and carry the question from the judgment of earth to the tribunal of heaven . . . The words first of all afford a testimony to the perfect insight of God into our hearts and lives, to His . . . present observation of them, His judgment upon them both present and future . . . . Every single thing that we say and do either pleases or displeases God. If it has no other value, it is made pleasing to Him by a pervading spirit of faith, by an habitual regard to Him, on the part of him who does it, or displeasing, whatever its apparent merit, by the habitual absence of this spirit. . . . God for a whole year looked upon David with disapprobation and disfavour. It is not said that David was aware of this. The contrary is rather to be inferred. . . But we see clearly . . that all the prayers and all the praises of that whole year went for nothing with Him to whom they were addressed. . . . It is a solemn thought that there are multitudes with whom this is so all their life long; multitudes with whom this is so for an integral portion, it may be, of their threescore years and ten. . . . . But it is not only upon our intercourse with God that this deplorable condition acts so fatally: it puts our life all wrong: it is impossible that anything can be in its place. . . . Remember, finally, this state is not necessarily, nor perhaps, commonly, a *temporary* state. It may last till death: and then:—! It is the tendency of such a state to prolong, to perpetuate itself; it contains in itself a blinding, searing, deadening power. . . . If these things be so, let us not disguise it. Our eternal life depends upon knowing the truth; first the truth of man, and then the truth of God; first our state as it is, and then the change promised. *Vaughan.*

Even in David's fall Satan is defeated and God is glorified by means of Satan's devices, which appears as follows, viz.:—1. We have here a strong proof of the veracity of Holy Scripture. David's sin was committed in private. He was a king, a powerful king, beloved by his people, and—as is clear from his penitential Psalms—he was sincerely contrite for his sins; and in the rest of his life he did that which

was right in the sight of the Lord (1 Kings xv. 5). Besides, one of the worst consequences of the publication of his sin would be that he would have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme (ch. xii. 14). Might it not therefore have been expected that a veil would have been thrown over his sin, and that it would not have been exposed to the eyes of the world in Holy Writ? If Holy Scripture had been the work of *man*, the considerations would have probably prevailed, and David's sin would not have been exposed to our view; or, if it had been revealed the historian would have extenuated it, as many of the Hebrew Rabbis have done. But the Author of this book is the Holy Ghost. . . . He reminds us that we have to do with One who is no respecter of persons . . . . and in reading the Bible we have the satisfaction of knowing that in it there is no suppression of facts, no disguise or extenuation from worldly motives; that in the Bible alone we have the revelation of the perfect Historian, "*Ne quid falsi dicere audeat, ne quid veri non audiat.*" . . . 2. This history is also a moral test of the readers of the Bible. The consequence of David's sin is stated by Nathan (chap. xii. 14). But woe to the *enemies* of the Lord! Woe to those who *blaspheme* Him! For it is written, "All thine enemies, O Lord, shall feel thine hand," etc. (Psa. xxi. 8). The *enemies* of the Lord may turn the food of Scripture into *poison*, and may abuse David's sin into an occasion of selling themselves into the hands of the tempter, but the *friends* of God will take warning from his fall . . . and thus will derive a blessing from the Divine record. . . 3. If David's sin had not been recorded we should have been astonished, perplexed, and staggered by the series of tribulations which followed him henceforth to the grave. But this sad scene explains them all. . . If we had a similar view of men's secret sins, if we had a clear insight into our own as they are seen by God, the anomalies of the present state of things in this world would in a great measure disappear. . . . 4. The failings of a David and a Solomon reminds us also that no human examples are to be substituted for the Divine law as a rule of life, and that there is no spotless example but that of Christ.—*Wordsworth.*

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES. Ver. 3. "Was unto him," etc. "The custom of keeping pet sheep in the house, as we keep lap-dogs, is still met with among the Arabs." (*Keil.*) "As a poor man he had the means of buying only one little lamb, which he was now raising, and which he loved the more as it was his only property." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 5. "Shall surely die," or, "*deserves to die.*" "Because the forcible robbery of a poor man's pet lamb was almost as bad as man-stealing." (*Keil.*) "Four-fold." This was the compensation demanded by the Mosaic law. (Exod. xxi. 37.)

Ver. 7. "Thus saith the Lord." "Just as in the parable the sin is traced to its root—namely, insatiable covetousness—so now, in the words of Jehovah which follow, the prophet brings out in the most unsparing manner this hidden background of all sins." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 8. "Thy master's wives." It is a general custom in the East for a king to succeed to his predecessor's harem, and these words seem to show it was permitted to the kings of Israel. "Bishop Patrick and others give the later Jewish understanding of the law or custom; the king and no other person fell heir to the property and harem of his predecessor, but it did not follow that he actually married the inmates of the harem; they might be merely a part of the establishment. If it was a son that succeeded his father, he treated these women with reverence; if no blood relation existed between the two kings, the successor might actually take the women as his wives." (*Phillipson.*) "As to the morality of the act, it was the natural result of a polygamous system, and morally in the same category with it." (*Tr. of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 9. "**Slain.**" "This word *to murder* in the Hebrew is stronger than the one translated *to kill* in the former clause. "**With the sword of . . . Ammon.**" That David used the heathen to commit the deed, added to the guilt.

Ver. 10. "**Never depart.**" "That is, as long as the house or posterity of David shall last. . . . The bloody sword appears in the murder of the incestuous Ammon by Absalom (ch. xiii. 28, 29), in the death of the rebel Absalom (ch. xiii.-xiv.), and in the execution of Adonijah." (*Erdmann.*) "**Thou has despised Me.**" "This is here said instead of "Thou hast despised the word of the Lord.' For in His word *the Lord Himself* reveals Himself." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 11. "**I will take thy wives.**" The two crimes of murder and adultery were to be visited by distinct and separate punishments. (See chap. xvi. 22.)

Ver. 13. "**Thou shalt not die.**" What is the exact meaning of these words as applied to David? . . . The application of the law (Lev. xx. 10; Deut. xxii. 22) to an absolute Eastern monarch is out of the question, and if it were not, such an application would utterly mar the force of the passage. It is obvious, too, to observe that the criminal's *death* in the parable must represent some analogous punishment in the wider field in which the real events lay, where the criminal was above human laws, and Almighty God was the Judge. In other words, the death of the soul is certainly meant, as in Ezek. xviii. 4, 13, etc. (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 14. "**The enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.**" "Transgression of God's command by the king himself must lead the heathen to heap shame and reproach on Israel and its God; and there must therefore be expiation by punishment." (*Erdmann.*)

"Not only to the heathen, but also to the unbelieving among the Israelites." (*Keil.*) The external sufferings of David would be to all such blasphemers a witness to the holiness and justice of God. "David was also to discern in it a distinct token of the *grace* of God." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 15. "**The Lord struck the child.**" It appears that Nathan did not visit David until after the birth of Bathsheba's child, and therefore that David's impenitent state of mind lasted for many months.

Ver. 16. "**Besought God.**" "In the case of a man whose penitence was so earnest and so deep, the prayer for the preservation of his child must have sprung from some other source than excessive love of any created object. His great desire was to avert the stroke, as a sign of the wrath of God, in the hope that he might be able to discern, in the preservation of the child, a proof of Divine favour consequent upon the restoration of his fellowship with God." (*Von Gerlach.*) "**Went in.**" Rather, "**he came,**" not into the house of the Lord (ver. 20 is proof to the contrary), but into his house, or into his chamber." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 17. "**The elders.**" As in Gen. xxiv. 2, his oldest and most trusted servants.

Ver. 21. "**What thing is this?**" "This state of mind is fully explained in Psalm li., though his servants could not comprehend it." *(Keil.)*

Vers. 15-22. "In this short passage the Divine names are used with greater variation than usual. Verse 15 has "**Jehovah**" (the Lord); verse 16 has "**God**;" and in verse 22 the Hebrew text has "**Jehovah,**" where in our version is God. Whether the sacred historian was guided in the employment of these names by some unknown principle, or he used them indiscriminately it is difficult to decide." *(Jamieson.)*

Ver. 23. "**I shall go to Him.**" Wordsworth sees in these words "an evidence of David's belief in the personal identity of risen saints, and in everlasting recognition in a future state." It seems quite evident that at least "the continued existence of the child's soul in Sheol is here assumed, and the hope of re-union with it expressed." *(Erdmann.)*

Ver. 24. "**She bare a son.**" "In all probability Solomon was not born until after the capture of Rabbah and the termination of the Ammonitish war. His birth is simply mentioned here because of its connection with what immediately precedes." *(Keil.)* "**Solomon,**" *i.e.* the man of peace (*Keil.*) It was probably given "from the wish that peace might be allotted to him as God's gift, in contrast with the continual wars of his father's life." (*Erdmann.*) Or as Keil and others remark, "because David regarded his birth as a pledge that he should now become a partaker again of peace with God."

Ver. 25. "**He sent.**" Expositors differ as to whether Jehovah or David is the subject here. It seems most in keeping with the construction to read with Kiel and others, "*Jehovah loved him, and sent,*" etc. . . . . "*and he* (Nathan, in obedience to the Divine direction) *called,*" etc. Some however make David the first subject, and understand the verb *sent* in the sense of delivered; *i.e.*, David committed the child to the care of Nathan, and Nathan gave him his higher name. Others again make David the subject of both verbs. "**Jedidiah,**" *i.e.*, beloved of Jehovah.

Ver. 26. The narrative now returns to chapter xi. 1. **"The royal city."** From verse 29 it appears that Rabbah was not wholly captured until David came, and unless "the whole result is here summarily stated in advance" *(Erdmann)*, this seizure must refer to that part called in the next verse the *water city*.

Ver. 27. **"The city of waters,"** or, the *water city*. The ruins of this city (see note on chap. x. 8) show that it lay on both sides of a narrow valley, through which runs a stream which is a tributary to the river Jabbok. The citadel still stands on the northern declivity. Apparently, Joab took all the city with the exception of this stronghold.

Ver. 28. **"It be called after my name."** Erdmann, Keil, and others, prefer to read "*and my name be named upon it;*" *i.e.*, I receive the honour of the capture. "Joab's conduct here is either that of a devoted servant, wishing to give his master honour or shield him from popular disfavour (on account of Bathsheba), or that of an adroit courtier who will not run the risk of exciting his king's envy by too much success (see 1 Sam. xviii. 6-8).—*(Tr. of Lange's Commentary.)*

Ver. 29. **"All the people,"** *i.e.*, all the men of war who had remained behind in the land; from which we may see that Joab's besieging army had been considerably weakened during the long siege, and at the capture of the water-city." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 30. **"Their king's crown."** "So that he was either taken prisoner, or slain at the capture of the city." *(Keil.)* **"A talent,"** etc. "About 100 English pounds." *(Tr. of Lange's Commentary.)* "This heavy crown of gold and precious stones might have been worn during the coronation by a strong man like David. In many places now weights scarcely less heavy are borne on the head even by women. We need not therefore suppose that the weight is accidentally exaggerated," *(Keil)*, or that "the crown was supported on the throne above the head." *(Clericus.) (Erdmann.)*

Ver. 31. **"Under saws,"** etc. This must be rendered "he cut them in two with the saw." The other instruments mentioned denote also *cutting tools*. **"The brick-kiln."** Keil understands that they were burned in the brick-kiln, but some expositors read with Kimchi, "*he passed them through Malcham*," *i.e.*, the place where the Ammonites laid human sacrifices in the arms of the red-hot image of their god, Moloch. (See Lev. xviii. 21.) But many contend that the Hebrew text cannot be so translated, and its true signification is very uncertain.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-13.

DAVID'S REPENTANCE.

I. The first step in David's return to God is taken by God Himself. "The Lord sent Nathan." The man who has fallen into a pit and broken his limbs must have help from without. It is useless to expect him to climb out unaided—someone must come and lift him out if he is ever again to find himself on the spot whence he fell. The first step to recovery must come from outside and from *above* himself. David had fallen by his own want of vigilance into a horrible pit of sin; his moral backbone was broken (Psa. li. 8), and he could no longer stand upright before his conscience and God, and the longer this state continued the deeper did he sink into the mire of moral insensibility. Some help must come from without if he is ever to recover, in any degree, his lost position—some means must be taken to awaken within him, first a sense of guilt and then a hope of pardon. God sends the means and thus takes the first step towards reconciliation between Himself and David, and He does the same we believe in all similar cases. The tendency of sin is either to harden the transgressor or to fill him with despair. He either tries to palliate his guilt or he is so overwhelmed by the consciousness of it that he becomes hopeless of ever being free from either its penalty or its power. But provision has been made by God to meet both states of mind. He has sent a greater than Nathan, and in Christ (2 Cor v. 19) has taken the first step in reconciling the world unto Himself.

II. The means used are wonderfully adapted to attain the end desired. There is no parable of the Old Testament that can be compared with that of the "ewe lamb." Its skill in concealing its application reminds one of our Lord's

parable of the vineyard and the wicked husbandmen, (Mark xii. 1-12) and in practical application to the heart and conscience it has never been surpassed. A consideration of the analogy and contrast which it sets forth as existing between Uriah and David shows how fitted it was to set before the latter the aggravated guilt of his deed. 1. *The analogy.* The men in the parable were, in some respects, on an equality; they were fellow-men and fellow-citizens. "There were two men in one city." So David and Uriah, although one was a king and the other a subject, were on a level on the common ground of humanity, and were both subject to the laws, political, social, and religious which had been given by God to the nation which regarded Jerusalem as the seat of government. David was by birth a member of the highly favoured nation to whom God had given laws direct from heaven, and Uriah by choice was a citizen of the city of the great king, and stood in this sense on a level with his royal master, as did the poor man of the parable with his oppressive fellow-citizen. 2. *The contrast.* "The one rich and the other poor." Wealth means power to gratify one's desires, to execute one's purposes to a great extent. Poverty often means the necessity of submission to the will of those socially above us even though they be beneath us in every other respect. It was so with the oppressor and the oppressed in the parable, and it was so with Uriah and David. The king's position made it possible for him to indulge his lawless desires without hindrance. The position of Uriah put his domestic happiness and his life at his master's disposal, and this inequality aggravated David's crime. The parable seems to hint at a further contrast. "The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb." David had many wives; we infer from the narrative that Uriah had but one. His love was therefore deeper, because purer, than that of David. The owner of many wives could not gauge the deep affection of the husband of one wife, even as the rich man of the parable could not understand the feeling with which his poor neighbour regarded his only lamb. Both the points of resemblance and of contrast were calculated to set the many aggravations of David's sin before him when once his conscience began to awake from its long slumber. Until this moment David had evidently never looked his crime in the face; now it was so placed before him that he saw it in all its enormity, stripped of any palliation or excuse which he might have thrown over it, if he had known it for his own. It is also probable that Nathan, who was evidently much esteemed by David, had in past days informed the king of deeds of injustice committed by his rich subjects against their poorer brethren. Add to this the fact that Nathan had been the mouthpiece of God's goodwill to David and his house, and we shall see how adapted were both the messenger and the message—first to secure the desired attention, and then to produce the needed conviction. The whole transaction is an exhibition of the manifold wisdom and the gracious condescension which ever marks the dealings of God with his erring creatures, and puts into the mouth of every restored wanderer the song, "*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*" (Psa. ciii. 8).

III. God's pardon of the sin follows immediately upon David's confession. This is the law of the kingdom of God, both before and since the death of the Sinbearer—"*If we confess* our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." (1 John i. 9.) In the narrative before us the same verse contains the acknowledgement of the guilt and its remission;—it seems as though David had hardly uttered his confession before he received an assurance that he was pardoned,—that is, that the worst effect of sin—the displeasure of God—was removed. This by no means, as we see from David's subsequent history, frees the transgressor from all the penalty of his transgression, but it opens or reopens the way of access to a merciful God, and gives a different aspect to all the chastisement that follows. If David had, in his own words, still "*kept silence*"

before God, (Psa. xxxiii.), he would have had no place of refuge in the calamities of his after life; but having acknowledged his iniquity, he was able to look for help to the very hand that smote him. This is the great and vital difference between the afflictions of the forgiven and the unforgiven sinner. The former must still suffer many of the consequences of sin, but the deadly sting is gone from them, and although the sentence pronounced at the fall is not reversed for him any more than for the latter, his relations to the Lawgiver are those of a forgiven child instead of a rebel subject. David's history shows how ready God is to let a man pass from the one position to the other.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. He must be of God's sending that shall effectually awaken conscience and speak to the heart. Nathan the prophet is here purposely sent to let good David feel the bruise of his fall. . . . If God's best children have been sometimes suffered to sleep in sin, at last he awakeneth them in a fright. Now because men that are awakened hastily out of a deep and sweet sleep are apt to take it ill, and to brawl with their best friends, wise Nathan beginneth his reproof, not in plain terms, but by an allegory . . . . and it is most likely he did it privately, that he might the more easily work and win upon him. . . . Private admonition saith one, is the pastor's privy purse, as princes have theirs, besides their public disbursements.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 2. The greater was his sin, since pressed with no necessity. What need had the angels to leave their first estate and habitation? (Jude 6.) What need had Adam to reach after a deity? What need had Ahab to covet Naboth's vineyard? etc. It is no small aggravation of a man's sin to fall into it without strong temptation.—*Trapp.*

Vers. 3-5. It is most instructive to observe that Nathan in his parable calls attention, not to the sensuality and cruelty of David's crime, but simply to its intense and brutal selfishness. . . Remember this, even as regards the special sin of which David was guilty. Many, perhaps, who would excuse themselves on other grounds for the ruin which, by the indulgence of their own passions, they help to bring upon the souls and bodies of their fellow-creatures, might be startled, as was David, if once they could be convinced of its mean and selfish baseness.—*Dean Stanley.*

Vers. 5 and 6. This energy of virtue, this mighty effort to get credit with oneself for a lively sense of right and hatred of injustice—who does not recognise it? Who should not tremble when he thinks—the evil spirit who prompts to this consummate deceit and hypocrisy is near to me? I am tempted continually to fly from the light which would show me the foul spots in my own soul, by projecting them outside of me, and pronouncing sentence upon them in another man.—*Maurice.*

I. *Impartial reason is ever ready to condemn any flagrant iniquity.* There is as discernable a difference between good and evil as between white and black, when nothing interposes to obstruct the sight, or misrepresent the object. When a particular case happens to be entangled with something of nicety, there may be room for doubt, or need of consideration, but in general men can pass judgment readily and boldly. David wanted not the wisdom of an angel to discern what common sense would have dictated in a like case. But—II. *The prejudices of interest and lust, may, and do hinder men from discerning, or at least distinguishing in practice between right and wrong, even in the plainest cases.* Such was most apparently the case with David. There was no room for comparison between two injuries of a size so unequal. He who was so tenderly sensible of what the poor man was supposed to suffer, could not possibly be ignorant

of how much the injured Uriah must have suffered. In the heat of his indignation against a supposed oppressor, he put on the severity of a judge more rigorous than the law directed. And this when he had been guilty of a cruelty which left not the possibility of restitution. III. *Although men do sometimes suffer themselves to commit gross sins, in open contradiction to their own inward light, yet all notorious iniquity stands condemned by the universal verdict of mankind.* It is no easy matter to bribe the reason and warp the judgment so far as to make men advocate their own irregularities; but let sinners once sit in judgment on each other, and they will all come in condemnation in their turns, and all with equal justice. While the affections are unengaged, and temptation at a distance, nature recoils at the very thought of a great enormity. (See 2 Kings viii. 13.) It is probable had David been foretold by Nathan how he would act in the matter of Uriah, he would have answered him in the words of Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?"—*Dean Moss.*

Vers. 5–7. I. *Men as sinners are frequently ignorant of their own characters.* . . . Although there is no subject of more vital interest to man than himself, and none which he has such facilities for studying, yet of nothing is he more ignorant. . . . When Christ warned Peter of his denial of Him, the apostle exclaimed "Though all men deny thee, yet will not I deny thee;" but within a few hours Peter *repeatedly*, and with *oaths*, denied his Master. . . . . Why are we so ignorant of our own characters? I may mention three reasons:—First, *The lack of a sin-resisting force.* "Sin," says Caird, in his admirable sermon on *Self-Ignorance*, "can be truly measured only when it is resisted." Steam is an illustration. So long as it is allowed to pass away freely and unrestrained from the boiling vessel its power is inappreciable; but resist it, endeavour to confine it, and it will gather a force that will shiver you to atoms. Conscience is the sin-resisting force, and this in the sinner is weak, etc. Secondly, *The infirmity of the sin-detecting power.* Conscience is this power, and by depravity it often gets deadened so that it does not feel or see. If the thermometer is frozen, how can you tell the temperature of the air? . . Thirdly, *The repulsiveness of a sin-polluted heart.* Man feels that all things within are not right. He suspects that there are disease, danger, and a lurking enemy there, and he keeps away. He regards his own heart as the insolvent debtor regards his ledger, etc. II. *The men who are most ignorant of themselves are most severe in their judgment of others* . . . . This principle is illustrated also in the parable of the householders (Matt. xxi. 33–42); in the history of Caiaphas (Mark xiv. 63); and in the conduct of the Pharisee in the temple, in relation to the Publican. He that has the "beam" in his own eye sees the "mote" in his brother's eye . . . . III. *However self-ignorant a man may be, a period of self-recognition must come.* . . . . I have read in ancient history of a dumb prince who had never spoken a word in all his life, till one day he saw an enemy draw a sword against his father; and as he beheld the fatal blow descending, the terrible feeling unlocked his tongue and made him speak. So it will be with all dumb consciences soon. The period of self-recognition came to some of the murderers of Christ on the day of Pentecost; and they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" It came to Paul, and he exclaimed, "What things were gain to me, I counted loss." When God touches the conscience, the man stands self-revealed.

> Awakened conscience acts the artist;
> Uses the Sun of Heaven's law
> To photograph the sinner's life,
> Then holds it up a life-like picture—
> A hideous monster to the affrighted eye.
>
> —*Dr. David Thomas.*

Ver. 13. Two things are to be remarked in connection with David's

penitential utterance. 1. *That he regarded social wrongs as sins against the Lord.* All that appears to us in the crimes of which he was convicted was purely *social.* . . . . Still, inasmuch as social order is a Divine institution, wrongs against society are sins against God. Things are *right* and *wrong* between man and man because Heaven has willed them so . . . . and the sinner's grief, when conscience is aroused, is not so much that he has injured man, as that he has insulted his Maker. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned." 2. *That he felt that he himself was responsible for the commission of those sins.* He does not refer to the tempter or the temptation,—does not say a word about necessity and the influence of circumstances upon his organisation; no, no! all this will do very well when conscience is sleeping for the intellect to speculate about. But conscience despises your fatalism, dashes its logical fabrics to pieces. "I have sinned." . . . . Taking Nathan's language as expressing forgiveness of sin, the following remarks are suggested. 1. *Forgiveness is a real act.* It is not a mere vision, or an idea of a superstitious mind, nor a mere figure of speech;—it is a "*putting away of sin.*" . . . . 2. *Forgiveness is an act performed by the Lord.* . . . . None can forgive men's sins but the Lord. . . . . 3. *Forgiveness is an act which delivers from death.* "The wages of sin is death." . . . . "Thou shalt not die"; even thy physical dissolution shall be only a sleep. 4. *Forgiveness is an act dependent on repentance.* . . . . Repent, that your sins may be blotted out, etc. 5. *Forgiveness is an act with which the true minister has much to do.* Whilst we repudiate the doctrine of priestly absolution, we hold it to be the right and duty of every true minister of Christ to do what Nathan now did,—Declare Divine forgiveness to Him who has proved the genuineness of his penitence.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

It may seem to some, that a penitence thus suddenly produced could be neither very deep nor very thorough. But to those who think thus, three things must be said.

First: an impression may be produced in a moment which will remain indelible. We have heard, for example, of one who, as he was travelling in an Alpine region at midnight, saw for an instant, by the brilliancy of a flash of lightning, that he was in such a position that another step would have been over a fearful precipice, and the effect upon him was that he started back and waited for the morning dawn. Now such a flash of lightning into the darkness of David's soul, this "Thou art the man," of Nathan's, was to him. It revealed to him, by its momentary brilliance, the full aggravation of his iniquity. He did not need or desire a second sight of it. That was enough to stir him up to hatred of his sin, and of himself.

But, second: we must, in connection with this narrative, read the Psalms to which David's penitence gave birth, namely, the 51st and the 32nd; and if these are not the genuine utterances of a passionate sincerity, where shall we find that quality in any literature? Admirably has Chandler said of the 51st Psalm: "The heart appears in every line; and the bitter anguish of a wounded conscience discovers itself by the most natural and convincing symbols. Let but the Psalm be read without prejudice, and with a view only to collect the real sentiments expressed in it, and the disposition of heart that appears throughout the whole of it, and no man of candour, I am confident, will ever suspect that it was the dictate of hypocrisy, or could be penned from any other motive but a strong conviction of the heinousness of his offence, and the earnest desire of God's forgiveness, and being restrained from the commission of the like transgressions for the future. Furthermore, as another evidence of the genuineness of David's repentance, we point to the words of Nathan, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin," and ask if the prophet, as

Jehovah's representative, would have said anything like that if the penitence of David had not been sincere. . . . What, really, is the distinction between the people of God and the wicked on the earth? Is it that the one class commit no sins, while the other fall into iniquity? No; the godly man does sin. No one will be more ready to acknowledge that than himself. The difference, therefore, is not there. It lies in this: that when the child of God falls into sin, he rises out of it and leaves it, and cries to God for pardon, purity, and help; but when the ungodly man falls into sin, he continues in it, and delights in it, as does the sow in her wallowing in the mire. It is a poor, shallow philosophy, therefore, that sneers at such a history as this of David; nay, it is worse even than that: it is the very spirit of Satan, rejoicing, as it does, in the iniquity of others. On this point, however, I gladly avail myself of the language of a living writer, not usually considered to have any very strong bias in favour of the Scriptural views of men and things — I mean Thomas Carlyle. "Faults!" says this author, in his "Lecture on the Hero as Prophet;" "the greatest of faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none. Readers of the Bible, above all, one would think might know better. Who is called there the man according to God's own heart? David, the Hebrew king, had fallen into sins enough; blackest crimes; there was no want of sins. And thereupon unbelievers sneer and ask, 'Is this your man according to God's heart?' The sneer, I must say, seems to me but a shallow one. What are faults? what are the outward details of a life, if the inner secret of it—the remorse, temptations, true, often baffled, never-ending struggle of it—be forgotten? 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' Of all acts, is not, for a man, repentance the most Divine? The deadliest sin, I say were that same supercilious consciousness of no sin. That is death. The heart so conscious is divorced from sincerity, humility, and fact—is dead. It is pure, as dead dry sand is pure. David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul toward what is good and best. Struggle often baffled sore, baffled down into entire wreck, yet a struggle never ended; ever with tears, repentance, true, unconquerable purpose begun anew. Poor human nature! Is not a man's walking in truth always that —'a succession of falls?' Man can do no other. In this wild element of a life, he has to struggle upward: now fallen, now abased; and ever with tears, repentance, and bleeding heart, he has to rise again, struggle again, still onward. That his struggle be a faithful, unconquerable one, that is the question of questions."—*Taylor.*

The greatest griefs are not most verbal. Saul confessed his sin more largely, less effectually. God cares not for phrases, but for affections. The first piece of our amends to God for sinning is the acknowledgment of sin: he can do little, that in a just offence cannot accuse himself. If we cannot be so good as we would, it is reason we should do God so much right, as to say how evil we are. And why was not this done sooner? It is strange to see how easily sin gets into the heart; how hardly it gets out of the mouth: is it because sin, like unto Satan, where it hath got possession, is desirous to hold it, and knows that it is fully ejected by a free confession? or because, in a guiltiness of deformity, it hides itself in the breast where it is once entertained, and hates the light? or because the tongue is so feed with self-love, that it is loath to be drawn unto any verdict against the heart or hands? or is it out of an idle misprision of shame, which, while it should be placed in offending, is misplaced in disclosing of our offence?—*Bp. Hall.*

Vers. 5–13. The sin of David, and his unconsciousness of his own sin—and so also his repentance through the

disclosure to him of his own sin—are exactly what are most likely to take place in characters like his, like ours, made up of mixed forms of good and evil. The hardened, depraved, worldly man is *not* ignorant of his sin; he knows it, defends it, he is accustomed to it. But the good man, or the man who is half good and half bad—he overlooks his sin. His good deeds conceal his bad deeds, often even from others, more often still from himself. . . . For others, this history teaches us to regard with tenderness the faults, the sins, the crimes, of those who, gifted with great and noble qualities, are, by that strange union of strength and weakness which we so often see, betrayed into acts which more ordinary, commonplace characters avoid or escape. We need not, nor dare, deny their sin . . . but we must thankfully acknowledge the background, the atmosphere, so to speak, of excellence which renders a return from such sins possible . . . . And for ourselves, let us remember that such a foundation of good as there was in David's character is never thrown away. If it is not able to resist the trial altogether, it will at least be best able to recover from it. David's fall sufficiently teaches us, not to rely on our religious principle, however sound, nor to trust in our religious zeal, however fervent; but his repentance bids us humbly hope that whatever good purposes and sincere prayers and faith in God, and love of Christ, we have been able to retain amid the changes and chances of the world, will stand in the evil day, and do us good service still: there will be something to which we can appeal with the certainty of some response when the first flush of passion, the first cloud of self-deceit has passed away.—*Dean Stanley.*

Another view of the effect of David's humiliation may be noticed, not as if it were a matter of certainty, but rather as a suggestion for study and consideration. There is reason to think that this new exercise of David's soul—his deep sense of sin, and bitter experience of its fruits—fitted him for a most important function, which he would now begin to fulfil more especially than heretofore. These exercises of his soul enabled him to become more suitably the type of the sin-bearing Jesus, and to give utterance to those feelings of deep oppression and agonizing grief that, in their fullest and deepest meaning, none could appropriate but the Man of Sorrows. Up to this time David had had comparatively little acquaintance with the burden of sin; . . . . but no one could in any measure foreshadow the Messiah without a deep personal acquaintance with the burden of guilt. . . . . In one aspect it may be a startling thing to suggest that a time of writhing under the horrors of guilt fitted David better to become the type of the sinless One. But in another aspect the statement is no paradox. . . . . It is not meant that either in kind or degree David's feelings were identical with the suffering Messiah, but only that the resemblance was such that the language which was suggested by the one was suitable, and shown to be suitable, to express the other.—*Blaikie.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—25.

David's Punishment.

I. A sinful deed committed by a child of God must be punished to vindicate the justice of the Divine government. The human king and father who claims to be the representative and executor of law is bound to begin at home, and exact strict obedience from the members of his own family before he deals with those outside his household. For if his home discipline be lax, and he overlook transgressions in his children that he would punish in other men, he loses his reputation as a just and impartial ruler. Indeed, those who stand most nearly

related to him are rightly counted more blameworthy than others if they violate the law, inasmuch as their near relation implies a more perfect knowledge of what ought to be done, and therefore a more binding obligation. It is especially needful, therefore, that *their* sins be visited with the deserved penalty, and such a visitation is quite consistent with personal forgiveness of the offender. God, who claims to be the supreme ruler of all the nations, chose the Hebrew people as His especial inheritance, and selected David from the rest of the nation to stand in a peculiar and intimate relation to Himself. All the nation was under special obligation to obey the laws of God, and David was bound to obedience by even stronger ties than any of his subjects. As an Israelite he was called upon to show to the heathen around an example of godly living, and as the chosen king of Israel, and the professing servant of Jehovah, he was bound to be a living revelation of God's law to his own people. If his great sin had not been openly punished, and if the punishment had not been heavy, the reputation of the Divine Law-giver would have suffered. Therefore, although his sin was "put away" upon confession, justice demanded all the suffering that followed. This law is of necessity in constant operation in the government of God. "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*" (Amos iii. 3.) Peculiar privileges and distinguishing marks of Divine favour are not licences to sin, but reasons why it cannot be lightly passed over.

II. The result of an unlawful deed soon changes from a source of pleasure into one of pain. The thief who succeeds in capturing his booty congratulates himself upon all the enjoyment he hopes to purchase with it. But it may be that he presently stumbles beneath its weight, and so enables the officer of justice to overtake and capture him, and thus the very largeness of the gain that he secured for an hour becomes the means of days and months of sorrow. It is not always, nor generally, that retribution follows so quickly upon the heels of wrong-doing, but whether its results be enjoyed for a longer or shorter period, they will one day be the cause of bitterness. David was allowed to enjoy, so far as a guilty conscience would permit him, the fruits of his sinful union with Bathsheba for a short time. It is evident that the child that was born to him was a source of joy to his heart. But soon that very source of his gladness was smitten, and the fountain whence the streams of pleasure had flowed now sent forth only bitter waters. From what we know of David we may conclude that the sufferings of an innocent child would have given him pain under any circumstances, but how great an addition to his mental suffering must it have been to remember that, in this instance, his guilty passion was the cause of all. This leads to the remembrance—

III. That those who commit the sin are not the only sufferers from it. This is an inevitable, although sad, consequence of that relativity between human creatures which is also the cause of so many blessings. As none can say where the effects of sin will end in relation to his own soul, so it is impossible to calculate how far its evil influence will extend in relation to others. Sometimes, as in the case before us, only *bodily* suffering is entailed upon the child by the transgressions of the parent, but often, alas, the sin of the father bears more deadly fruit in the moral contamination which it communicates to the children. David's infant child suffered bodily pain and death because of the iniquity of its parents, and no man—especially no parent—can sin without bringing misery of some kind upon those related to him. Our children, and others connected with us, can, by Divine help, free themselves from the *moral* consequences of our wrong-doing, but the law which binds our sin and their bodily or mental suffering together is one which cannot be broken in the present life. Blessed be God it can reach no further; but surely it reaches far enough to

furnish an all-powerful motive to every man to pray, "Lead me not into temptation." If men will not hear the voice which cries "Do *thyself* no harm," and will contend that they may do what they please with their own souls, can they find even the shadow of an excuse for bringing pain and loss upon others, even though that pain and loss be only temporal?

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 14. This observation gives us an insight into the whole position of David. In him the good principle had attained to supremacy; the godless party had seen this with terror; and now they mocked piety in its representative, who, because he held this position, ought to have kept watch over his heart the more carefully.—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 15. It is solemnizing to think that the one sinless member of the family—sinless as to actual sin—is the first to reap the deadly wages of sin. It leads the thoughts straight to the doctrine of imputed guilt; it makes us think of mankind as one great tree with ten thousand branches; and when the faithless root sends up poison instead of nourishment, it is the youngest and tenderest branchlet that first droops and dies.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 16. We like to read these words, for they tell us that David, though an erring son of God, was yet a son. A godless man would have been driven farther from Jehovah by these troubles, and might have been led to make proclamation of his utter atheism; but David went to God. The more heavily he felt the rod, the nearer he crept to him who used it. He fled from God to God. He hid himself from God in God. This shows that his sin was out of the usual course of his nature. It was like the deflection of the needle, due to certain causes, which at the time he permitted to have influence over him; but, these causes removed, his old polarity of soul returned, and in his time of trouble he called on Jehovah. This was his habit. Repeatedly in his Psalms has he employed language which clearly indicates that God was regarded by him as a strong rock, whereunto, in time of trial, he continually resorted. Thus we have him saying, on one occasion, of his enemies: "For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer;" and again, "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I."—*Taylor.*

Ver. 18. Repentance may come too late—is respect of temporal chastisements, which are yet not penal, but medicinal. (1 Cor. xi. 32.) Thus Moses and Aaron were kept out of Canaan for their disobedience at the waters of Meribah.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 20. A godly man saith Amen to God's Amen; and putteth his *fiat* and *placel* to God's. (Acts xxi. 14.)—*Trapp.*

It is worthy of particular observation that the first step of the Psalmist in the day of his sorrow is "to the house of the Lord." His conduct is worthy of imitation. I know not where the children of sorrow should go, if not to the house of their heavenly Father. It is in the holiness of the sanctuary that this "beauty" is found which the prophet was to give instead of ashes to those "who mourned in Zion." It is in the sacred vessels of the temple that the "oil of joy" is kept which God's people are to have "for mourning."—*Bp. Dehon.*

Ver. 22. God was gracious to him in that the child did not live. How could he ever have looked upon him without grief and shame? How oft do God's children find themselves crossed with a blessing! and ont he contrary —*Trapp.*

Ver. 23. We may learn from David's words here, that we may cherish the most unwavering assurance of the salvation of those who die in infancy. Even in the comparative darkness of the Jewish dispensation, the Psalmist had the fullest persuasion of the eternal welfare of his baby-boy; and, under the Gospel economy, there are many things revealed which tend to make the doctrine of infant salvation perfectly indubitable. Not to refer to the fact that, as they have committed no actual transgressions, little children do not personally deserve condemnation, and may, therefore, presumably be regarded as included in the provisions of the covenant of grace, there are certain things which to my mind place the doctrine to which I refer beyond all question.

In the first place, there seems to me a moral impossibility involved in the very thought of infants being consigned to perdition. For what are the elements in the punishment of the lost? So far as we know, they are these two, memory and conscience. But in an infant conscience is virtually non-existent. Moral agency and responsibility have not yet been developed, and so there can be no such thing to it as remorse.

Again: memory has nothing of guilt in an infant's life to recall, and so it seems to me to be utterly impossible to connect retribution of any sort in the other world with those who have been taken from the present in the stage of infancy.

But, in the second place, there are positive indications that infants are included in the work of Christ. I grant at once that there is no one passage which in so many words makes the assertion that all who die in infancy are eternally saved; but then we may not wonder at the absence of such a declaration, since it would have been liable to great abuse; and we do not need to regret that we have it not, because there are many passages which very clearly imply it. Thus Jesus said of infants, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." This does not mean only, as some would have us to believe, that the kingdom of heaven consists of persons resembling little children. The word translated "of such" has evidently a definite reference to children themselves, and has elsewhere been employed in that way by the Saviour himself.—*Taylor.*

The issue of things doth more fully show the will of God than the prediction: God never did anything but what He would; He hath sometimes foretold that for trial which His secret will intended not: He would foretell it; He would not effect it; because He would therefore foretell it that He might not effect it. His predictions of outward evils are not always absolute; His actions are. David well sees, by the event, what the decree of God was concerning his child, which now he could not strive against without a vain impatience. Till we know the determination of the Almighty, it is free for us to strive in our prayers; to strive with Him, not against Him: when once we know them, it is our duty to sit down in a silent contentation.—*Bp. Hall.*

Whether David clearly expressed faith in the immortality of the soul or not, we know that the thing is true; and . . . even the heathen derived consolation from the reflection that they should meet their friends in a conscious state of existence. And a saying in Cicero, *De Senectute*, which he puts into the mouth of Cato of Utica, has been often quoted, and is universally admired: "O happy day" (says he) "when I shall quit this impure and corrupt multitude, and join myself to that Divine company and council of souls who have quitted the earth before me! There I shall find, not only those illustrious personages to whom I have spoken, but also my Cato, who I can say was one of the best men ever born, and whom none ever excelled in virtue and piety. I have placed his body on that funeral pile whereon he ought to have laid mine. But his soul has not left me; and without losing sight of me, he has only gone before me into a country where he saw I should soon rejoin him."—*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 24. Yea, sons, and David's best sons came of Bathsheba, because they were the fruit of their humiliation. Nathan, of whom came Christ (Luke iii.), is ranked before Solomon (2 Sam. v. 14; 1 Chron. iii. 5, and xiv. 4), but Solomon was the elder brother by Bathsheba, and a notable type of Christ, both in his name and in his reign. This may be for comfort to such as have leaped rashly into marriage; yea, have entered into that holy ordinance of God through the devil's portal, if for that they be after soundly humbled *Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 26—31.

THE FINAL CONQUEST OF AMMON.

I. To forego honour in favour of another is often as prudent as it is kind. If a man is beneath us in social position, or is less known or esteemed than we are, we ought to be able sometimes to stand back a little in order that he may be raised or brought forward and reap some of the benefits of which we have enjoyed so large a share. It is surely not a great self-denial for him who has won many prizes in the race of life, now and then to slacken his pace so that a less favoured person may taste the sweets of victory. But when those with whom we are engaged are our equals or superiors, prudence sometimes dictates such a course when benevolence does not prompt it. Those who feel themselves on a level with us, or know that they stand above us in many respects, are more likely to be jealous of our successes, and to look on us with suspicion if we leave them too far or too constantly behind in the contest for renown. If we desire to retain their goodwill we must sometimes put aside our just claims in their favour. The previous and the subsequent history of Joab lead us to incline to the view that his conduct at this time was actuated by this latter motive. He *might* certainly have acted as he did out of kindness of heart. If this event happened—as is most likely—before David's repentance, Joab must have seen how ill at ease his master was, or, if the occurrence took place after the message of Nathan, David would still be in a depressed state of mind, and it is possible that Joab suggested his expedition against Rabbah to divert him from his gloomy thoughts. Or David's reputation among his subjects may have suffered by his sinful conduct, and his general may have resorted to this expedient to restore the king to his old place in their esteem by reviving his military fame. But we think his proposal was dictated rather by prudence. David had already somewhat against him in the murder of Abner, and had doubtless marked him as an ambitious and unscrupulous man. Joab could not be unconscious of the deep offence he had given to David when he slew Abner, and was too wise a politician not to know how far he might go and yet retain his position at the head of the army. So, although he had a perfect right to complete the undertaking which he had carried so far, he showed great wisdom in now giving it into David's hands, and thus laying him under a new obligation to continue his favours.

II. External success is no criterion by which to judge how a man stands in relation to the favour of God. By the conquest of Rabbah David completed that series of victories which made him secure against all his heathen foes. When the crown of the king of Ammon was placed upon his head and he returned to Jerusalem laden with spoil, those who measure how far a man's ways please the Lord by the amount of temporal success which He grants him, would say that now David was enjoying more of the Divine favour than ever before. But there can be little doubt that this campaign was undertaken while the heavy displeasure of God was resting upon David, and even if it did not take place until after his repentance, all this outward splendour stands in sad contrast to the inward gloom which must have overshadowed David's spirit when he thought of the terrible

sentence, "The sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me." David the shepherd and the fugitive was really enjoying far more of the Divine approval and favour than David the conqueror of Ammon, and this episode of his life is another illustration of a truth we are prone to forget even in the light of the Cross, that a man's external circumstances are no indication of his standing in the kingdom of God.

III. Isolated actions of men are often strangely at variance with their character as a whole. As we read this paragraph, we seem to want to transpose the names of the actors—to put into David's mouth the words of Joab, and to make Joab responsible for all that is here ascribed to David. Such a change would harmonize entirely with the characters of the two men regarded in their entirety. As the record stands, the apparently unselfish words of Joab sound as strangely in his lips as the boastful and cruel deeds of David seem out of harmony with his general spirit. If we knew no more of either of these men, how false would be the estimate we should form of their characters. But all who are observant of men in general, and especially of their own lives, know well how often very good men act inconsistently with their profession, and how it not unfrequently happens that, in individual instances, they suffer when compared with men who are morally far below them. A bad man sometimes seems to rise above himself, and really does so at times, and even the best of men often fall far below their better nature. It behoves us, therefore, always to abstain from passing hasty judgments, and to look at a man's deeds in the light of the general tenor of his life.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The whole conduct of David at Rabbah is strange and painful. It was not creditable to be roused to an enterprise by an appeal to his love of fame; he might have left Joab to complete the conquest and enjoy the honour which his sword had substantially won. It was unworthy of him to go through the empty ceremony of being crowned with the diadem of the Ammonitish king, as if he set an extraordinary value on having so precious a crown upon his head. Above all, it was very terrible to show so harsh a spirit in disposing of his prisoners of war. But all this is quite likely to have happened if David had not yet come to repentance. When a man's conscience is ill at ease, his temper is commonly sullen and irritable. Feeling himself pursued by an enemy whom he dare not face, he avoids solitude and reflection—he courts bustle and business, and every kind of exciting and engrossing occupation. Uncomfortable and unhappy in his inmost soul, he is just in the temper to become savage and cruel when crossed. . . . The whole occurrence shows that want of humility, admiration, love, and obedience towards God, tells darkly upon the whole life and character.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 28. Do we the like by Jesus Christ, when we get any victory over our spiritual enemies, let him have the whole glory; say we as those two disciples in Acts iii. 12–16.—*Trapp.*

CHAPTER XIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Absalom**" and "**Tamar**" were the children of Maacha, and "**Amnon**" was David's eldest son by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess (see chap iii 2, 3).

Ver. 2. "**Was so vexed,**" etc. Literally, "*it became narrow or strait to Amnon unto becoming sick,*" *i.e.*, his desire wrought upon him and affected his health. "**He thought it hard,**" etc., rather, *it seemed impossible* to him to do anything to her. Tamar, as all Eastern women are, was of course kept in close seclusion, she was also evidently modest and reserved. "Though Amnon's passion was forbidden by the law (Lev. xviii. 11), yet, with the sanction of Abraham's example (Gen. xx. 12), and the common practice in neighbouring countries for princes to marry their half-sisters, he seems not to have considered it an improper connection." (*Jamieson.*) Ewald remarks that Amnon's character and conduct were doubtless affected by the fact that he was the firstborn son, and that his mother was not of noble origin.

Ver. 3. "**Jonadab.**" Although none of David's brothers were promoted to places of honour and emolument under government, probably from the feeling of alienation which existed between the king and them, David seems to have acted in a kindly spirit towards their children; and the case of Jonadab is one of several known instances in which he had these young relatives about his court. (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 4. "**Day to day.**" Lit. *from morning to morning.* "His aspect was more wretched in the morning after a night made sleepless by torturing passions." (*Erdmann*). "A finely chosen point in the description of his malady, from which also it appears that Jonadab was, if not his house-mate, at least his daily companion." (*Thenius*). "**My brother Absalom's sister.**" "In Eastern countries, where polygamy prevails, the girls are considered to be under the special care and protection of the uterine brother, who is the guardian of their interests and their honour, even more than their father himself (see Gen. xxxiv. 6-25). (*Jamieson*).

Ver. 6. "**Cakes.**" Literally *heart cakes.* "Whether they received their name from their heart-like shape, or their heart-strengthening power, is undecided. The word is *lebibah* and the Hebrew for heart is *leb.*" (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 7. "**Amnon's house.**" "It is evident that the king's children lived in different houses. Probably each of the king's wives lived with their children in a different compartment of the palace." (*Keil*). "**Dress him meat.**" "The cakes seem to have been a kind of fancy bread, in the preparation of which oriental ladies take great delight." (*Jamieson*).

Ver. 9. "**A pan.**" The etymology of this word is uncertain, and many scholars think it is a name for some preparation of food. "**Have out all men,**" etc. This might have been simply regarded as the whim of a sick man.

Ver. 12. "**Folly.**" "The words recall Gen. xxxiv. 7, where the expression folly (*nebalah*) is first used to denote a want of chastity. Such a sin was altogether out of keeping with the calling and holiness of Israel." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 13. This is generally understood to be an expedient resorted to by Tamar, by which she sought to "escape from the hands of Amnon by any means in her power, and to avoid inflaming him still more, and driving him to sin, by precluding all hope of marriage." (*Clericus.*)

Ver. 15. "**Then Amnon hated her.**" "This sudden change, which may be fully explained from a psychological point of view, and is still frequently exemplified in actual life, furnishes a striking proof that lust is not love." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 16. "**This evil,**" etc. This entire phrase is very obscure, and has been variously rendered. Erdmann supposes an unfinished sentence in which Tamar was interrupted by Amnon. Keil understands her to say, "Do not add to the great wrong which thou hast done me the still greater one of thrusting me away," and adds, "Tamar calls his sending her away a greater evil than the one already done to her, because it would inevitably be supposed that she had been guilty of some shameful conduct herself,—that the seduction had come from her,—whereas she was perfectly innocent."

Ver. 17. "**Then he called,**" etc. "Thus leading the servant to suppose that Tamar had done something shameful." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 18. "**A garment,**" etc. Rather, "*a long dress with sleeves.*" "The usual under-garment covered only the upper arm, while this covered the whole arm, and took the place of the armless outer garment or robe." (*Erdmann.*) "**For in this manner,**" etc. Translate—"*Thus did the king's daughters, the virgins, clothe themselves with robes*" "The writer inserts this

remark to show that, notwithstanding this dress, by which a king's daughter could at once be recognised, Amnon's servant treated Tamar like a common woman." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 19. "**Laid her hand on her head,**" etc. "As a sign that the hand of God was resting on her as it were, *vid.* Jer. li. 37." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 20. "**Been with thee?**" A euphemism for what had taken place. See Gen. xxxix. 10. "**Hold now thy peace.**" "Because he was determined to take revenge, but wished to conceal his plan of vengeance for the time." (*Keil.*) "**Desolate,**" *i.e.*, "as one laid waste, with the joy of her life hopelessly destroyed. It cannot be proved that the word ever means single or solitary." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 22. "**Neither good nor bad.**" Not a single word, as in Gen. xxiv. 50.

Ver. 23. "**Had sheep-shearers.**" See on 1 Sam. xxv. 8. "**Baalhazor.**" This place cannot be exactly identified. "**Ephraim.**" No *city* of this name is mentioned in the Old Testament. Erdmann contends that the use of the preposition shows that a city is meant, and Eusebius says that there was one of that name eight miles north of Jerusalem. Keil, however, understands the clause to "point to a situation on the border of the tribe-territory of Ephraim."

Ver. 25. "**Blessed him,**" *i.e.*, wished him a pleasant and successful feast," see 1 Sam. xxv. 14. *(Kiel).* "**Be chargeable.**" "The first intimation in history of the ruinous expense of royal visits." *(Kitto).*

Ver. 26. "**My brother Amnon.**" "The first-born, as thy representative." *(Thenius).* "**Why should he go?**" Seeing that David eventually yielded, it is, as Kiel remarks, uncertain whether he had any suspicion of foul-play, but it is well known that the long delay of the act of revenge would be quite in accordance with the spirit of Eastern nations. Erdmann remarks that David's yielding is an indication of weakness.

Ver. 29. "As David had weakly left Amnon's crime unpunished, Absalom held it his duty to take vengeance on Amnon, and maintain his sister's honour. This feeling does not, however, exclude the motive of selfish ambition in Absalom; by the death of Amnon he would be one step nearer to the succession to the throne; there may, indeed, have been another brother, Chileab, older than he (chap. iii. 3), but probably (to judge from Absalom's conduct, chap. xv. 1-6) he was no longer alive. Absalom's ambition, which afterwards led him into rebellion, probably welcomed this pretext for putting Amnon, the heir to the throne, out of the way." *(Erdmann).* "**Mule.**" "This is the first mention of a mule in Scripture. The meaning of Gen. xxxvi. 24 is questionable. Compare below, chap. xviii. 9; 1 Kings i. 33. The breeding of mules was forbidden to the Hebrews (Lev. xix. 19); but their use was regarded as lawful." *(Wordsworth).*

Ver. 31. "**Servants,**" *i.e.*, *Courtiers.*

Ver. 32. "**By appointment,**" etc. Rather, "*On Absalom's mouth was it laid,*" etc. Either one could infer from his words what his intention was or, according to Thenius "one could see it in him, for the movements of the soul are seen (next to the look) most clearly about the mouth."

Ver. 34. "**Behind him.**" "That is, according to well-known *usus loquendi* (see Exod. iii. 1, comp. with Isa. ix. 11; Job xxiii. 8) simply *from the west*, since *in front* means geographically the east. "**By the way of the hill,**" or rather, from the side of the mountain, is probably Mount Zion. The princes came not from the north, but from the west, because the return by this route was easier and quicker. *(Erdmann).*

Ver. 37. "**Talmai.**" The father of Maacha, Absalom's mother (see chap. iii. 3).

Ver. 39. This verse begins with a difficult clause, which renders its meaning very obscure "The verb," says Dr. Jamieson, "being feminine, does not refer to David, neither is it correct to say that David longed to go forth to Absalom; for there is no ground to suppose that he entertained either an intention or a wish to visit his exiled son. The clause should be rendered, *The anger of David ceased to go forth,*" etc. Erdmann and Keil translate, "David held back, or did not go forth," etc.; and the former remarks, in support of this rendering, that "David could have sent for Absalom if he wanted him, and that, so far from feeling any love-longing towards Absalom, David was permanently set against him, as appears from the fact that after Joab had got him back it was two years before the king would see him." This view necessitates a reading of chap. xiv. 1 directly opposite to the English translation, which conveys the idea that David *did* long to recall Absalom, but was prevented from doing so by judicial and political considerations. (See on that verse.)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

THE SIN AND MURDER OF AMNON.

I. Children who have both a bad and good example are more inclined to follow the former than the latter. This truth is seen in little things as well as in great, and the reason is the same in both cases. If a child who is learning to draw has both a good and bad specimen set before him he will be much more likely to imitate the bad than the good, because it is always easier to make crooked lines than straight ones, and to produce a faulty piece of work than one that is perfect of its kind. And so it is in higher and more important things. If a parent is guilty of transgression at one period of his life, or continually indulges in one bad habit, he is more likely to see his children copy him in that respect than in those things in which he fulfils his duty and is blameless, inasmuch as it needs no effort on their part to do wrong, but it is sometimes a great struggle to do right. This law was in operation to its fullest extent in the case before us. Amnon and Absalom had seen their father do many noble deeds. For many years David had lived before his children a life consistent with his high calling and profession. But, so far as we know, none of the children who were witnesses of these things walked in the same path; but these two elder sons who might have been expected to profit most by his good example were not slow to imitate his crimes. This is not so surprising as it is sad, when we remember that every one of us comes into the world with a tendency to go the wrong way, and that a man has only to give himself up to the rule of his passions in order to become a monster of iniquity while it is hard work to fight against our evil tendencies, and more than human strength is needed to overcome them. Amnon and Absalom had only to make no resistance to evil suggestions—only to give impure and malicious thoughts a lodging-place in their hearts—and the work was done. The seeds were sure not to lie dormant but in due time to germinate and bring forth the fruit of wickedness after their own kind. It is this indwelling evil inclination in every human soul which makes it so much more certain that our evil deeds will be copied than that our goodness will be imitated, and which should therefore make every child of God doubly watchful over all his actions for the sake of others as well as for his own. For how doubly bitter is the sorrow of a good parent over an erring child if he ever find himself in the position to which David's sin had now brought him.

II. Those who violate the sanctity of their neighbours' homes do so at the peril of their own family honour and peace. There is a law in the spiritual as in the physical world, that like will produce like. The law of the vegetable kingdom, that each herb should yield seed after its kind and thus multiply its own likeness, has its counterpart in the moral kingdom, and it is found that sin not only propagates sin in general but sins of the same class. And thus retribution of the severest kind, and yet in accordance with the strictest justice, is brought home to the offender. By the base and brutal conduct of Amnon and the murderous revenge of Absalom the entire household of David was afflicted and his family honour and peace destroyed. But Amnon was only indulging the same unlawful desires to which his father had sacrificed the honour of Bathsheba and the life of Uriah, and Absalom's murder of his guilty brother was certainly not a blacker crime than David's sacrifice of his faithful servant. And if the deeds of these young men brought desolation into David's home they only did what David had himself done in the case of Uriah. Let

men beware how they trample on these sacred rights, for they may be sure that God will now, as then, vidicate them in a like manner.

III. Those who do not bridle their animal passions become a compound of brute and demon. In this transaction Amnon exhibits all the propensities of the animal, and adds to them the maliciousness of the devil. He was not content with accomplishing by violence the ruin of his young and innocent sister, but he was base enough to lay upon her all the disgrace of the crime. We might have thought that when he descended to the level of the beast he might have remained there, and at least have shown the regard for his victim which a beast would have done. But a man is not a beast, and therefore when he lets his animal nature get the upper hand he suffers by comparison. That which is natural to the creature without reason and conscience is sin to those created in the image of God, and it is vain for any man to think that unlawful indulgence of the body will ever fail to degrade the spirit. There have been those in all ages who have taught otherwise, and especially with regard to the sin here under consideration. But if the word of God did not emphatically contradict this doctrine (1 Cor. vi. 15–20, etc.) the experience of life would show its fallacy. Sin against the body is sin against the whole man, and that which is sensual, unless very speedily repented of, soon leads to that which is devilish.

IV. The freedom and power given and permitted to the wicked in this world is a strong argument for the existence of another life The weak and the virtuous among men are here often at the mercy of those who are strong and wicked; the former often suffer grievous wrong by reason of the liberty which the latter have to carry out their evil purposes. Herod, the base libertine, had power to imprison and to slay John, the greatest of the prophets, thus violating every sense of justice, and the kings and potentates of every age have always had it more or less within their power to persecute the moral salt of the earth because they had the greater physical force at their command. And in the narrow circles of social and domestic life the same things have happened ever since Cain slew his brother Abel, because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous. The story of Amnon and Tamar is always being repeated in its main features, and the strong man is ever using the weaker woman to satisfy his guilty passion and then casting her forth to bear the shame alone. Does not the sense of justice within us call for a hereafter to set these things right and to give compensation and punishment according to men's deserts? The partial retribution which is dealt out here and now is an earnest that a more complete system of rewards and punishments exists in the future life, and that a day is at hand when full restitution shall be made to those who have here been the innocent victims of the wicked and powerful.

V. When those in authority do not punish crime they betray their trust and give occasion to greater wickedness. A man in David's position is not at liberty to consult his own feeling as to the punishment of the transgressor. As God's minister, he is set for the terror of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well, and a failure of duty in this direction makes him a partaker of the evil deed. If he bear the sword in vain and withold his hand when he ought to strike, he will find that he will only give opportunity and encouragement to other lawless men, and, like David, he will have two offenders instead of one. If he had punished Amnon as he deserved he might not have had to mourn the rebellion and death of Absalom.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 4. He saith not, my sister, for shame; sin is a blushful business.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 1–39. David had his wives and concubines. No divine edict told him that such indulgence was unlawful. For, thanks be to God, though He makes use of edicts and statutes, it is not by these mainly that He rules the universe. The Bible is, from first to last, the history of a practical education; God leading men by slow degrees to enter into His mind and purposes and to mould their own into conformity with His. If we want exemplifications of all the miseries and curses which spring from the mixture of families and the degradations of women in a court and country where polygamy exist, David's history supplies them. No maxims of morality can be half so effectual as a faithful record of terrible facts like these.—*Maurice.*

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"Now Joab,"** etc. Most commentators attribute Joab's action in this matter to motives of self-interest. It appears highly probably that Absalom was now the heir to the throne (see on chap. xiii. 29), and Joab was therefore anxious to secure his goodwill by being of service to him. **"Toward Absalom."** Most scholars, in accordance with the Syriac, the Septuagent, and the Vulgate versions, sustain the English reading here, but Erdmann and Keil contend that the preposition here used has the sense of *against* in this place. The latter says לֵב, written with עַל and without any verb, only occurs again in Dan. xi. 28, where it means against. He further remarks that, "if Joab had noticed the re-awakening of David's good feeling towards Absalom, there would have been no necessity for him to bring the cunning woman from Tekoah to induce him to consent to Absalom's return. Moreover, David would not in that case have refused to allow Absalom to see his face for two whole years after his return."

Ver. 2. **"Tekoah."** Now Tekue, about five miles south of Bethlehem and the home of the prophet Amos. "According to the Talmud, there were important oil plantations in the neighbourhood, and the women there were noted for their shrewdness."(*Philippson.*)

Ver. 7. **"The heir also."** "These words are added to the preceding (we will kill him) by reason of the second thought that characterises the blood-revenge, namely, that while they kill him for *blood-vengeance*, they wish at the same time to destroy the surviving heir. The woman's purpose is not only to bring out the design of the kinsman in their blood-avenging as harshly as possible, but also, with reference to David's hostile feeling to Absalom, to emphasize the point that the latter is the *heir* to David's throne, and to save him as such from his father's anger." (*Erdmann.*) **"Quench my coal."** "The burning coal with which one kindles a fresh fire to denote the last remnant." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 8. **"Go to thine house,"** etc. This declaration on the part of the king was perfectly just. If the brothers had quarrelled and one had killed the other in the heat of the quarrel, it was right that he should be defended from the avenger of blood, because it could not be assumed that there was any previous intention to murder. This declaration, therefore, could not be applied as yet to David's conduct towards Absalom." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 9. **"The iniquity be on me,"** *i.e.*, **"If it be wrong not to carry out the blood-shedding."** (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 11. "Let the king remember the Lord," etc. Either she desires David to confirm his promise by an oath or she reminds him of the great mercy which God had extended to Himself in pardoning the murder of Uriah.

Ver. 13. "**Against the people of God.**" The ambiguity of this phrase has led some to render it, "*Why dost thou propose such things towards the people of God*," *i.e.* such protection towards me and my son." But most critics reject this rendering. Erdmann understands by *the people of God*, the nation who would suffer by the rejection of one who would one day be their King.

Ver. 14. "**We must needs die,**" etc. Thenius refers these words to Amnon's death with the meaning, "he had to die sometime, and all you can now do against the murderer will not restore him to life." But most writers understand the woman to mean "Absalom may die in banishment and then your pardon may come too late," or "As life is so short and uncertain do not embitter it by enmity." "**Neither doth God respect,**" etc. Rather. "*God doth not take away any soul, but thinks thoughts, not to banish a banished one.*" "An argument from God's procedure with the sinner. He does not take away the soul (life) of one that is banished, condemned for sin, so as thus to banish him for ever. These words must have brought to David's recollection God's mercy towards himself." (Erdmann.) "This is one of the noblest and profoundest declarations of the Scripture. God, who has determined us to death, nevertheless does not deprive us of *life*, of personality, but has the holy purpose to receive against the banished, the sinful." *(Philippson.)* This (last) explanation makes the first half of the verse merely introductory to the thought in the second, merely a relative sentence containing an affirmation about God; this is not so probable as the view which makes the first half a separate argument. The argument, though powerful, is false; the human Judge cannot set aside the demands of justice, though God may pardon the sinner." (*Translator of Lang's Commentary.*)

Ver. 15. "**The people have made me afraid,**" *i.e.* Her kinsfolk who demanded her son. "The woman returns again to her own affairs, to make the King believe that nothing but her destress led her to speak thus." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 17. "**Comfortable,**" literally, *for rest*, *i.e.*, shall give me rest. "**Angel of God.**" "The angel of the covenant, the mediator of divine grace to the covenant nation." (*Keil.*) "**To discern good and bad.**" "This affirms two things. 1. In every case brought before him, the king, he will impartially hear both sides. 2. He helps the oppressed." (*Erdmann.*) "There is a great deal of artifice in all this. For to presume upon the kindness of another and expect gracious answers from their noble qualities is very moving." (*Patrick*).

Ver. 19. "**None can turn to the right,**" etc., *i.e.* The king always hits the right point She compliments the king on the sagacity which enabled him to penetrate the secret.

Ver. 20. "**To fetch about this form,**" etc. Erdmann translates this, "*To turn the face of the thing*, *i.e.*, to change the relation of Absalom to his father." Keil renders, "*To turn the appearance of the king*," understanding thereby, to disguise the affair in the finest way.

Ver. 23. "**Hath fulfilled the request.**" These words are generally understood to indicate that Joab had repeatedly pleaded for Absalom's return.

Ver. 24. "**Let him not see my face.**" "This was no real pardon. David's anger still continued. It is a natural surmise that this was because Absalom showed no repentance and did not ask for forgiveness." (*Erdmann.*) "**His own house.**" His being obliged to send for Joab suggests that Absalom was *confined* to his house.

Ver. 26. "**He polled his head,**" *i.e.*, cut his hair. "**Two hundred shekels after the king's weight.**" The king's shekel is probably a different weight from the sacred shekel, and probaly less than that. Kitto mentions reading of a lady's hair that weighed more than four pounds; and, if two hundred shekels is not more than this, it is a possible weight. The ancients were accustomed to bestow much care on the hair." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 27. "**Three sons.**" From the fact that, contrary to custom, the names of these sons are not given, and from chap. xviii. 1 it is concluded that they died in infancy.

Ver. 30. "**Set the field on fire.**" Some commentators regard this act of Absalom as an expedient to bring him face to face with Joab; and others look upon it merely as an act of angry revenge.

Ver. 32. "**Let me see the king's face.**" Rather, "*I will see*," etc. "Being sure that if he could do that all would be gained; such was his confidence in the tender-heartedness of David." (*Wordsworth.*) "The message sent by Absalom through Joab to his father contains—1. A reproach. '**Why am I come from Geshur?**' Why didst thou send for me if I am not permitted to appear before thee? 2. A reprobation of the indulgence shown him in the permission granted him to return home: '**it were better for me that I were still there.**' 3. A self-willed demand, '**and now I will see the king's face.**' 4. A defiant challenge. '**If there be iniquity in me, let him kill me.**' From the tone of his speech he does not allow that he has done wrong, but relies on the right he thinks he has against his father, who had been too indulgent to Amnon." *Erdmann.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-24.

The Return of Absalom.

I. The most mischievous reasoning is that which is a compound of truth and falsehood. When an argument is wholly founded on an untruth, the conscience not entirely blinded can pass sentence upon it without hesitation, and if a man yield to such an argument, he does so with his eyes wide open. But where, as in the case before us, many undeniable facts are pleaded in favour of acts which at best are of doubtful character, only the most honest and unprejudiced can see through the delusion. The assertions of this wise woman were perfectly true. Those who grant mercy abroad should begin at home, and enmity ought to die before those who are at enmity die. The long forbearance and abounding mercy of God are also blessed and undeniable facts, and all these considerations might have been lawfully urged upon David in relation to any private act in which Absalom had sinned only against his father. But he had transgressed that Divine law which it was David's special duty to uphold, and against which the king sinned when he permitted it to be violated with impunity. No human executor of law is actuated by a feeling of personal enmity, but is simply a representative of laws, which, if they are just, are necessary safeguards of society, and as such, are approved and even commanded by God. Such a man fails in his duty both to God and man if he allow personal feelings to influence his conduct either for or against the offender. We cannot gather from the history (see Critical Notes) what David's real feelings were in relation to his son, and therefore cannot tell what effect the argument of this parable had upon him; but it is an excellent sample of many of the sophistries by which people in all ages and under all circumstances seek to justify what is contrary to justice when it is agreeable to their inclinations and likely to promote their interests.

II. Those who are conscious of having committed great sins are not fit to deal with other offenders. The immediate result of this parable was a half-measure which made matters worse than they were before, and leave us in as much doubt as ever as to David's real motives and feelings. It was more trying and irritating to Absalom to be banished from his father's presence in Jerusalem than in Geshur, and if his message to him was defiant there was reason in it, for it seemed mockery to recall him merely to make him a prisoner or keep him in disgrace at home. But all David's weakness and unsteadiness of purpose in dealing with his sons arose from the consciousness that when one became an adulterer and the other a murderer, they were only following his example. Such a man is as unfit to deal rightly with a transgressor as he who is smitten with paralysis is unable to administer corporal chastisement.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 14. It is by right of this apt beautiful saying that the wise woman of of Tekoah holds an earthly immortality. Ah, how God must have bound us each to each; what subtle far-reaching links must bind all the children of Adam into one; how solemn and mysterious an influence the humblest of us may exert on all, when the obscure prophetess of that dark age and distant land can still touch our hearts and shape our thoughts. . . The larger and more general application, the *principle* of the words I take to be, "Don't fret over the inevitable, the irreparable. The past is past and cannot be recalled; therefore be more intent on a wise use of the present.

Instead of crying over spilt water or trying in vain to gather it up from the dust, betake you to the fountain of living water, drink of the untainted perennial spring. Let your feet wear a track that shall guide other feet to its pure waters. Let your example be a standing invitation to your neighbours, that they also may repair to the fountain which no dust can defile, and drink of the clear life-giving waters which flow on for ever." 1. *Apply this principle to the limited facts of death and bereavement.* . . Fretting will not alter the inevitable. We *must* accept it whether with our will or against it. Let us then accept it with a patient cheerfulness which will take the sting out of it. 'Tis weak, 'tis useless, to sit down and weep over spilt water, when we have yet a long steep path to climb, and many around us who look to us for guidance and refreshment. . . . But it is not difficult to understand how many might say, "Why remind me that it is of no use to cry over spilt water?" I know it, and hence my tears. I weep the more because I weep in vain." . . . But we may find in the wise woman's words a larger and more consolatory meaning than any of which she was conscious. . . . For, observe; this spilt water of hers—what after all becomes of it? Though *we* cannot raise it up again, it nevertheless does rise again; no particle of it is lost. For a little while it lies in the dust and helps to make that fruitful. But it will be gathered up again; it must be. It will be drawn up into the skies to form a gracious cloud, which by and bye will fall in enriching showers and will be again lifted to the skies, again to fall, again to rise—so passing into a life of perpetual service. . . . And God, our sun, will shine upon our departed ones and will raise, purify, and ennoble them, consecrating them to an eternal service. . . . II. *If we bring the more general application of this principle home to our experience, we shall find it has instruction for all, and not only for the bereaved.* . . . As we recall the past, and as the years pass, and the inevitable changes ensue, we are too apt to spend time in crying over spilt water and in trying to gather it up again, and when we are haunted with the ghosts of lost opportunities and past sins, we are filled with a regret singularly like the sorrow of bereavement, and like that it is very apt to weaken us still more, and to interpose between us and the duties we have still to discharge. . . . It is vain to mourn that we are what we are. The weaker we are the more need to husband our strength; the more frequent and ample the opportunities we have missed, the more we should strive to improve those which are still open to us. . . . We are assuredly to repent of our sins and mistakes, but the true cleansing virtue of repentance does not lie in the tears we shed but in the amendment which, trusting to a higher strength than our own, we hopefully attempt. And in nothing perhaps is the healthy bracing spirit of the gospel more conspicuous than in this, that when we are truly sorry for our sins, we find that it is a sorrow that worketh *life;* that while we are still mourning over our manifold offences it virtually says, "Leave all those with Him who has made an atonement for the sin of the world." . . . . Nay, more, though *we* cannot gather up the spilt water, God can and does. The sun of His love shines down on the earth on which it has fallen, and lo, it rises from the earth in new and purer forms! All the useful and helpful elements of our past experience are gathered up by Him, and detached from the polluting dust with which they were blent, and the very tears we have shed are drawn up into the spiritual heaven, to fall in fertilising showers on ground barren but for them; and as they fall the Sun of Righteousness shines full upon them, and lo, a new bow of hope stretches across our brightening heaven, giving us the welcome assurance that, unfruitful as we have been in the past, henceforth seed-time and harvest shall never fail us.—(*Samuel Cox*, abridged).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 25–33.

David's Reconciliation to his Son.

I. The difference between the godly and the ungodly is manifested by the different light in which they regard their sins. This truth becomes very apparent if we compare the behaviour of Absalom at this time with that of his father after his great fall. We cannot say that the sin of the ungodly son was greater than that of his godly parent—indeed we are compelled to admit that the opposite was the case. Although no rightful excuse can be found for any wrong deed, Absalom could plead some extenuations of his crime and might even have invested it with a show of justice. But nothing can be said which can in any degree make David's guilt look less. And it must be confessed that in later days the godly man sometimes falls into more gross sin than his ungodly brother. But the grand line of demarcation is found in the difference in their conduct in relation to it. The one acknowledges and mourns over his fault, and perhaps, like David, goes with broken bones all the rest of his days, while the other either fails to see that he has done anything wrong or else excuses it on the plea of necessity or expediency. While all the acts of David, after his great sin, are pervaded more or less by a consciousness of his own unworthiness, we find in Absalom no trace of any regret that he was guilty of his brother's blood. On the contrary, all his subsequent actions are marked by the same unscrupulousness. The same regard for his own supposed interest and entire disregard of what he owed to other men or to God are displayed in every deed that is recorded of him, and make him a striking example of the radical difference which exists between the natural and the spiritual man even when the latter falls sadly below the moral standard we might reasonably expect him to maintain.

II. To restore a wrong-doer to favour unconditionally, in a sin against the person forgiven. The prodigal whom the father welcomed back returned with a confession upon his lips and such contrition in his heart as showed that his restoration to his old place in the home would be a blessing to himself and others. But if he had been re-instated without any acknowledgment that he had sinned, it would have been not only useless but injurious to him. If he had not felt the sinfulness of the past, he would have wandered again into the far country if a tempting prospect had been held out to him, and his last state would have doubtless been worse than the first. The elder brother might have justly complained at such an unconditional blotting out of the past, and would have rightly urged that it did harm both to the sinner and to the innocent man. This is not God's method. With Him it is—"*If we confess* our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive" (1 John i. 9). "*Repent and be converted* (turn to God) that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts iii. 19). For it is only the repentant to whom God's forgiveness can be of any use. In Absalom's case we see the consequence of his restoration to favour without any acknowledgment of his guilt—it gave him ample opportunity to organise and complete those rebellious designs which resulted in his downfall and ruin, and was therefore not only unjust but unkind.

CHAPTER XV.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES. Ver. 1. "**After this.**" Keil, Erdmann and Thenius attach the idea of *immediateness* to the Hebrew adverb here used, but other scholars consider this doubtful. The word occurs only here, in chap. iii. 28, and in 1 Chron. xxxii. 23, and its precise meaning cannot therefore be determined by usage. "**Chariots,**" *i.e.*, "*a state carriage.*" (*Keil.*) "**Fifty men.**" "These runners are accustomed to precede the equipage of persons of distinction in Oriental countries. They usually carry a staff or baton, which they constantly wave about them, and strike right and left to clear the way, especially in the streets of Oriental cities which are always narrow and crowded. . . . They can keep on at a rapid pace, with the equipage which they precede, for many miles without stoppage, their feet covered with dust and frequently bleeding from wounds. In ancient times fifty of these runners formed the usual attendance upon royalty. See 1 Kings i. 5." (*Jamieson*).

Ver. 2. "**Rose up early,**" etc. "The *gate* here referred to is the gate of the royal palace, whither those came that sought the decision of the king in law matters. (*Erdmann*). Malcolmson says that Oriental ministers hold their levees before western people of rank rise from their beds.

Ver. 3. "**No man,**" etc. *Lit.* "*No hearer for thee on the part of the king.*" The hearer signifies the judicial officer, who heard complainants and examined into their different causes for the purpose of laying them before the king." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 4. "**O that I were,**" etc. *Lit.* "*Who will make me,*" etc.

Ver. 6. "**So Absalom stole,**" etc. "The phrase may also mean to deceive the heart, as in Gen. xxxi. 20; but the connection shows that the meaning here is to bring a person over to one's side secretly and by stratagem." (*Erdmann and Keil.*)

Ver. 7. "**After forty years.**" It seems impossible to read *forty* in this connection as it cannot be understood either of David's reign or Absalom's age, as David's entire reign was only forty years and a half, and Absalom was born after his father became king. Almost all commentators read *four* years, but the chronology here must evidently be regarded as uncertain.

Ver. 7. "**Hebron.**" "Probably assigning as a reason that he was born there, but really because his father had been made king there, and also possibly because there may have been many persons there who had been displeased by the removal of the court to Jerusalem." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 8. "**Serve the Lord.**" Rather *to do a service*, explained by Josephus to mean to offer a sacrifice. "We have here an example of sacrificial feasting, not in connection with the tabernacle (as in 1 Sam. xx. 6), an indication that the strict law of Leviticus (Lev. xvii. 3, 4, and Deut. xii. 13, 14) was not in practical operation, else David would have objected to sacrificing in Hebron." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 9. "**Go in peace.**" "That David observed nothing of all this till the startling news reached him that the heart of Israel was turned towards Absalom, cannot be reckoned to his disadvantage, since so ancient and simple a kingdom had nothing like our modern state police; it is rather a mark of the noble-minded security that we elsewhere see in him, that he gives so free scope to his beloved son, who might be regarded as first-born and heir-apparent." (*Ewald.*)

Ver. 10. "**Spies.**" "So called because they were first of all to find out the feeling of the people and only execute their commission where they could reckon on support. (*Keil.*) "**The trumpet.**" "We must suppose that there were various stations where the summons was repeated." (*Cohen.*)

Ver. 11. "**Two hundred men.**" "Courtiers such as usually accompanied kings and kings' sons on their journeys." (*Erdmann.*) "**Called,**" *i.e.*, *invited* to the sacrificial feast. "**Knew not anything,**" *i.e.*, were ignorant of the conspiracy.

Ver. 12. "**Giloh.**" Upon the mountains of Judah and a little to the south of Hebron (Josh. xv. 51). "Ahithophel had no doubt been previously initiated into Absalom's plans, and had probably gone to his native city merely that he might come to him with greater ease, since his general place of abode, as king's councillor, must have been in Jerusalem." (*Keil.*) On the possible cause of Ahithophel's desertion of David, see notes on chap. xi. 3.

Ver. 14. "**Let us flee.**" "David's immediate flight is to be explained by the reason that he himself gives, by the fact that he sees that the fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy of approaching

misfortune is now beginning, that the punishment cannot be warded off, and that to stay in the city will only occasion much bloodshed." (*Erdmann.*) "To leave the city would be to gain the advantage of his military skill and of the discipline of his tried warriors in the open country." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary*).

Ver. 15. "**Servants,**" *i.e.*, soldiers. (*Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 17. "**A place that was far off.**" Literally, "*The house of the distance.*" "Probably a proper name given to a house in the neighbourhood of the city, and on the road to Jericho, which was called 'the farthest house,' viz., from the city." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 18. "**Cherithites,**" etc. See note on chap. viii. 18. "**Gittites.**" Most scholars identify this body of men with the *Gibborim* or *mighty men* mentioned in chap. xvi. 6. Some suppose that Gittite is a corruption of *Gibborim*. It is not likely that they were all natives of Gath, although they are said to have followed David thence. Most commentators consider that this body-guard was formed of David's first faithful followers (1 Sam. xxii. 2), kept always up to the number of six hundred by the addition of other trusted and valiant soldiers.

Ver. 19. "**A stranger,**" etc. "Do you remain with whoever is or shall be king, since there is no necessity for you as a stranger to take sides at all," (Keil) or, "You may remain quiet and see whom God shall appoint as king, and whether it be I or Absalom; you can serve the one whom God shall choose." (*Schmidt*). "*Stranger*—not an Israelite; *emigrant* or *exile*—one not in his native land." (*Erdmann*). Some suppose that the latter noun signifies that Ittai was a captive or a hostage taken in war, but his position in David's army is against such a supposition.

Ver. 20. "*Mercy and truth.*" From this and from Ittai's saying, "As the Lord lives," it is probable that Ittai, with his whole house, had already become a believer in the God of Israel." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 22. "**Pass over,**" rather, *pass on*, (*Keil.*) "**The little ones.**" "It is characteristic of Oriental people that they carry their whole family along with them in all their migrations." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 23. "**Kidron.**" This mountain torrent, which only flows during the rainy season, runs through the valley of Jehoshaphat, between the eastern side of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. "Afterwards passed over by the son of David, the King of Israel, when He was rejected by Jerusalem." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 24. "**Zadok**" and *Abiathar*. (See notes on chap. viii. 17.) "Zadok is placed before Abiathar by the historian, although Abiathar was the High Priest, either because Zadok, as the younger man, took the lead in bearing the ark, or perhaps because Abiathar was already beginning to show some signs of lukewarmness and disaffection towards David and his cause. The writer composed the history at a time when it was a well-known fact that Abiathar was deposed by Solomon for disloyalty, and Zadok was placed in his room (See 1 Kings i. 7, ii. 35.) (*Wordsworth.*) Keil and Erdmann consider that Abiathar did not join the procession until all the people had passed out of the city, and therefore his name could not have been placed first here. But the same order is observed in verse 29. "**Went up.**" "That is, to the summit of the Mount of Olives, where the ark was set down." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 27. "**Art not thou,**" etc., rather, "*Thou seer.*" On this word see note on 1 Sam. ix. 9. David's reasons for so naming Zadok is found in verse 25 *seq.* Through him David is to learn whether the Lord will again take him into favour and restore him to Jerusalem; that is, Zadok was to act as seer for him." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 28. "**The plain,**" rather the *fords*, the place where the Jordan could be crossed.

Ver. 30. "**The ascent of Olivet.**" "Josephus reckons the distance from Jerusalem to the top of the mount at five stadia, and Luke (Acts i. 12) says it was a Sabbath day's journey. The same pathway over that mount has been followed ever since that memorable day." (*Jamieson.*) "**His head covered.**" "Covering the head is the symbol of the mind sorrowfully sunk in itself, wholly withdrawn from the outer world. Comp. Esther vi. 12, Ezek. xxiv. 18." (*Erdmann.*) "See examples of King Darius having his head covered, 2 Curtius, lib. iv. cap. 10, sec. 33, and lib. v. cap. 12, sec. 8. (*Jamieson.*) "**Bare-foot.**" While all covered the head, this sign of mourning appears to have been adopted by David only either "as a penitent" (*Ewald*), or "to manifest his humiliation in the sight of God." (*Thenius*).

Ver. 32. "**Where he worshipped.**" Rather, *where men worshipped*, etc., supposed to have been one of the "high places" which then existed in Palestine. "**Hushai the Archite.**" See ver. 37, chap. xvi. 16, and 1 Chron. xxvii. 33. Keil and others consider him to have been a privy councillor. He was probably a native of the city of Ezek. (See Josh. xvi. 2.)

Ver. 33. "A burden." "He was probably a very old man." (*Keil*).

Ver. 34. "I will be thy servant." "This was not honest, but it was according to the policy practised in those days, and indeed in all ages; which Procopius Gazaeus approves so far as to say that 'a lie told for a good end is equivalent to truth.' But I dare not justify such doctrine." (*Patrick*).

Ver. 36. "Zadok," etc. "This was not an ordinary stratagem; these men were not simply spies, but we can avoid calling them traitors by supposing that the priests were not recognised as adherents of Absalom, but as indifferent non-combatants, or as friends of David." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

The Rebellion under Absalom.

We have here—

I. **An aggravated crime.** The rebellion of Absalom against his father would have been an act of great wickedness in whatever manner he had carried it out, but the cloak which he used to conceal it added to his guilt. He must have been a bad man indeed to conspire against his father's throne; but to dress up his base designs in the garb of patriotism, and even of piety, added hypocrisy to his other sins. But there appears to be no limit to the extent to which men will veil a vicious act in the semblance of a virtuous deed, and thus give proof of the great depravity of which human nature is capable.

II. **An aggravated calamity.** If Absalom's guilt was increased by the attendant circumstances so was David's sorrow. There was, *first*, the quarter from which it came. It was no small addition to the severity of the trial that the evil sprang from David's own house—that the rebel was one of his own children and apparently a son for whom he had a deep affection. And added to this was the fact that Absalom was aided and encouraged by one in whom David had placed implicit confidence, his "familiar friend," Ahithophel, whose faithfulness, it seems, he had never doubted (Psalm xli. 9). David had been warned to look for trouble, and for trouble from his own family; but he could hardly have expected so heavy a calamity as the one which now befel him nor is it likely he had ever thought it possible that Absalom and Ahithophel would be the chief instruments of his chastisement. Then, again, it must have been a bitter surprise and mortification to David to find that so many of his people were ready to renounce their allegiance to him and to follow one who was in all respects his inferior, and who had no claims upon their gratitude. Faulty as David had been in his later years, and just as might have been the charge brought against him by Absalom (ver. 3), his rule upon the whole had been productive of great good to the nation, whereas Absalom had done nothing for it. Yet, when the standard of rebellion was raised, many men gathered to it who doubtless owed much to the efforts which David had made to benefit the people and thus showed themselves capable of great ingratidude. And we all know that unkindness from such a quarter is much harder to bear than when it comes from the hand of strangers. But by far the greatest aggravation of David's trial must have been the consciousness that he had brought it on himself. It was no arbitrary sentence which God passed upon him when He warned him that evil would come from his own house. If David's household had been ordered more in accordance with the will of God, and his own personal life been under more strict discipline, it is more than probable he would have had no such sons as Amnon and Absalom, and no subjects so faithless as Ahithophel and those who followed with him. But even if then such circumstances had arisen, the father and the king would have found strong consolation in the reflection that he was in no sense blameworthy. But he could not have this

strongest support in trial but had this burden in addition to all the others, that he was only reaping as he had sown. And, alas! although he alone was responsible for the sowing, many besides himself had to taste the bitter fruit. To a man like David, this must have been an inexpressible grief. To any true-hearted man or woman it is far easier to suffer than to be the means of bringing suffering upon others, even when it is a matter of pure misfortune. But surely nothing can cause such agony of mind as to look upon the miseries of others and to feel that we are the cause of it, and that by our own transgression. David now saw his kingdom rent by civil war with all its attendant desolations, and knew that he, and he only, was to blame; and as we look upon this man after God's own heart, ascending the Mount of Olives, where can we find a more vivid illustration of the terrible consequences of sin or of the inflexible impartiality of God. If David must thus suffer even after his repentance, what must be the tribulation necessary for those who live a life of rebellion against their God and their conscience and who have never, like him, acknowledged their transgressions and sought to be cleansed from their sin.

III. Calamity lightened by the faithfulness of friends and by confidence in God. If Absalom and his followers afford painful examples of human hypocrisy and ingratitude and make us ashamed of our manhood, the unselfishness and fidelity of Ittai and other servants of David more than redeem it from the disgrace. Although there are many false and cowardly men in the world, there are also many brave and noble ones, and times of trial, whether personal or national, are times of self-revelation which bring to light the real character of both the good and bad. If it had not been for Absalom and Ahithophel's treachery, David would never have known how deep was the affection which his friends felt for him, and their devotion would not have had the opportunity of manifesting itself and of gaining for them the admiration of future generations. So it is in all times—the wickedness of some brings out the goodness of others and strengthens their virtue and makes it shine more brightly. And to David, in this hour of sorrow, this loyalty—where perhaps he least looked for it—must have been what a spring of living water is to a weary traveller in a spot where he did not expect it. For the friend that comes without being sought in the day when friends are few, is indeed a well in the wilderness, which restores the strength of the fainting wayfarer and enables him to go on his way. To David this faithfulness on the part of man would be a pledge of the faithfulness of God, and a confirmation of the truth of his own words, "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

But David's own conduct and temper under the trial, tended also to lighten the affliction. Behind the wrong-doing of man he sees the righteousness of God and acknowledges the justice of the permissive providence which allowed such a calamity to overtake him. And although he knows that he is being chastised for his sin, he does not lose the sense of God's loving-kindness; but, as his words testify (see Psalm iii.) hopes in Him against whom he has sinned, having the blessed assurance that although he is thus afflicted, his iniquity is forgiven. Any man who is able thus to meet affliction, finds its sting removed, but a soul which cannot see a Divine hand behind the dark cloud, or, seeing it, does not recognise it as a hand of justice and love, is indeed in a sad case. Many as were the aggravations of David's calamity, it had this greater alleviation.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 2. The plot which Absalom was working out required a great amount of sapping and mining—a kind of labour extremely trying, and demanding much patience and self-command. Yet for years, apparently, he persevered in it, upheld and encouraged by the one hope of ultimate success. How much wiser in their generation are the children of this world than the children of light! If for wicked or selfish ends men toil with so much perseverance, how should good men labour in the service of God! —*Blackie.*

Ver. 19. David's general desertion by his own people—the tribe of Judah —and the attention which he received from comparative strangers foreshadowed the Lord's own experience, when betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and forsaken by all the apostles, His only sympathy seemed to come from the weeping women, and when strangers like Nicodemus and Joseph were left to attend his funeral.—*Blackie.*

Ver. 31. This text is a glass wherein God's justice is plainly to be seen. David had formerly falsely forsaken Uriah, and now God suffers Ahithophel to forsake David. . . . I. Let us learn *when our friends forsake us, to enter into a serious scrutiny with our own souls.* Hast thou never played false or foul with thy friend, if not in action yet in intention? Dost thou not mean to prove base if put to the trial? If so, know thy false friend hath only got the start of thee. . . . . II. *The most politic heads have not always the faithfullest hearts.* . . . While David swayed the sceptre, who more loyal to him than Ahithophel? and once David is in banishment, he falls first to Absalom; he loved to worship the sun rising; yea, while, David, the true sun, was but overcast with a cloud, he falls adoring a blazing star—a comet. . . . That cement which conglutinates hearts is grace and goodness, whereof many politic heads are utterly devoid (1 Cor. i. 26), and politic men make their own profit the rule and square of their lives. . . . Do not, then, undervalue the love of those who are of mean and inferior parts. Wise men have made use of such servants and found them more manageable and more profitable; though their judgments were weaker, their affections might be stronger than wiser men. III. *False friends will forsake thee in times of adversity.* He that believeth that all those who smile on him and promise fair in time of prosperity will perform it in time of his want may as well believe that all the leaves that be on trees at Midsummer will hang there as fresh and as fair on New Year's Day. Come we now to consider what good uses one may make to himself from the unfaithfulness of friends when they forsake us. 1. Consider with thyself whether thou hast not been faulty in entertaining tale-bearers, and lending a listening ear to them. Solomon says, "A whisperer separateth chief friends" (Prov. xvi. 28.) . . . 2. If herein thy conscience accuse thee not, examine thyself, whether there was not a *eæsum principium* in the first initiation of your love. How came you first acquainted. . . . Didst thou first purchase his favour with the price of a sin? For, know, friends unjustly gotten are not long comfortably enjoyed. . . . We see King Hezekiah, who procured Sennacherib's love by his sacrilege, enjoyed not that purchase which he made God and His temple pay for. (2 Kings xviii. 16.) . . . 3. If there has been no fault in the inclination, examine hath there been none in the continuance of your friendship? Hast thou not committed many sins to hold in with him? . . . Hast thou not flattered him in his faults, or at leastwise by thy silence

consented to him. . . . If Amnon, in cold blood viewing the heinousness of his offence, so hated Tamar, who only concurred passively in his transgression, how may our friends justly hate us, if haply we have been the causers, movers, and procurers of our badness! . . . 4. Hast thou not idolatrised to thy friend? Hath he not totally monopolised thy soul? It is just with God that those wooden pillars should break, on whom we lay too much heft. 5. Hast thou not undervalued thy friend? . . . If so, God hath taught the worth of a pearl by losing it. And this often comes to pass, though not in our friends voluntary deserting us, yet when God takes them away by death. . . . 6. It may be God suffers thy friends to prove unfaithful to thee, to make thee stick more closely to Himself. Excellent to this purpose is Micah vii. 5–7. As if he had said, "Is the world come to this bad pass that one must be far from trusting their nearest friends? It is well, then, I have one fast Friend on whom I may rely, the God of heaven." I must confess these words of the prophet are principally meant of the time of persecution, but they contain an eternal truth, whereof good use may be made at any time.—*Thos. Fuller.*

Ver. 34. In the midst of such piety and resignation, it is strange to find David asking his friend thus to act a dishonest part, and play the spy. We are not called to vindicate his conduct. The Scriptures simply record it; and we must not suppose that everything here is approved which is not directly, and in so many words, condemned. But we may say two things by way of debarring hasty judgment here. First —and I am using now the words of Professor Plumptre: "Slowly in the character of any people; more slowly still in that of any Eastern people; most slowly of all, perhaps, in that of Israel, have men risen to the excellence of veracity. We must not think that the king's religion was a hypocrisy because it did not bear at once the fruit of the spotless honor and unswerving truth which mark the highest forms of Christian goodness. The Christian Church herself has to notice many like inconsistencies among her crowned martyrs." Second: let us not forget what those means are by which, even in these modern days, with all our Christian loftiness of character, we seek to countermine and check political rebellion. Some years ago, while I was a resident in Liverpool, there was great talk of Fenianism. We heard of plots for the taking of the ancient city of Chester, and the burning of ships in our own docks. How did we hear of them? By spies, who feigned themselves Fenians for the time! and the man whose astuteness made these discoveries through means of Hushai-like instruments was rewarded by being made a companion of the Most Honorable Order of the Bath! Observe, I do not vindicate either David or these modern officers. I simply state the facts, and beg to say, that if men, with the New Testament in their hands, can do such things, we ought to be tender in our treatment of David here.—*Taylor.*

Vers. 16–27. There is no single day in the Jewish history of which so elaborate an account remains as of this memorable flight. There is none, we may add, that combines so many of David's characteristics—his patience, his high-spirited religion, his generosity, his calculations: we miss only his daring courage. Was it crushed, for the moment, by the weight of parental grief, or bitter remorse?—*Stanley.*

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Met him.**" "Ziba had therefore gone on in advance of the army (as Hushai did) in order more easily to secure David's attention after the first disorder was over." (*Erdmann.*) "**Bunches of raisins,**" *i.e.*, raisin cakes. "**Summer fruits,**" probably fig-cakes, as in 1 Sam. xxv. 18. "**A bottle,**" a *skin.*

Ver. 2. "**The asses,**" etc. "The manner of Ziba's trick was this (chap. xix. 26). Mephibosheth, learning of David's flight, had ordered asses saddled for himself and his servants, in order to repair to the king in token of his faithful attachment. Ziba had taken the asses together with the presents intended by Mephibosheth for the king, come to the latter, and left the helpless Mephibosheth in the lurch." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 5. "**Bahurim.**" (See note on chap. iii. 16).

Ver. 6. "**On his right hand,**" etc. *i.e.*, "On the right and left of the king." (*Keil*).

Ver. 7. "**Come out,**" etc., or "*Away, away.*" "**Thou bloody man.**" "He may possibly have attributed to David the murder of Ishbosheth and Abner." (*Keil.*) "Other, less probably, think also of Saul and Jonathan, and even of Uriah." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 8. "**The Lord,**" etc. "Shimei is so far devout and religious that he ascribes the present state of things wholly to Jehovah, but he ignores Samuel's sentence of rejection (1 Sam. xv.) and otherwise shows a bad spirit." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary*). "**Taken in thy mischief,**" rather "*thou art in thy misfortune.*"

Ver. 10. "**What have I?**" etc. *Lit.*, "*What to me and you?*" *i.e.*, what feelings and desires have we in common. It is evident that Joab also desired to put Shimei to death. "**The Lord hath said,**" etc. "By allowing him to do so. Since nothing happens against, or without the will of Him." (*Wordsworth.*) In the East they make use of bold figures, much less common among us, although not altogether unknown. They speak of the mediate cause without saying it is the mediate cause, and use the very expression which denotes the immediate cause. *We* should regard Shimei as an instrument in the hands of Providence. In the East they go a far greater length. There God *has done* and *commanded* all that men do contrary to His commandments." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 12. "**Affliction.**" Some translate this word into "*eye,*" and understand David to refer to his tears; but the correct translation appears to be "*iniquity,*" on which Erdmann remarks, "God's looking upon his iniquity" can then only be a gracious and merciful looking.

Ver. 14. "**Weary.**" *Ayephim.* Most scholars regard this as the name of a place since, if it is rendered *weary*, there is no mention of the place referred to by the word *there.* Jamieson, however, remarks that the absence of the particle of motion favours the English version. There is no other mention of a place of this name but that, as Kiel remarks, applies to many other places whose existence is never called in question.

Ver. 15. "**Men of Israel.**" "Very significant: The old malcontents, chap. ii. 8, 9." (*Thenius*).

Ver. 20. "**Give counsel,**" etc. This is the first cabinet council on record." (*Jamieson*).

Ver. 21. "**Go in unto,**" etc. "This advice was sagacious enough. Lying with the king's concubines was an appropriation of the royal harem, and, as such, a complete usurpation of the throne (see at chap. iii. 7) which would render any reconciliation between Absalom and his father utterly impossible, and therefore would of necessity instigate the followers of Absalom with all the greater firmness. This was what Ahithophel hoped to attain by his advice. For unless the breach was too great to be healed, with the affection of David towards his sons, which might in reality be called weakness, it was always a possible thing that he should forgive Absalom, and in this case Ahithophel would be the one to suffer But under the superintendence of God this advice was to effect the fulfilment of the threat held over David in chap. xii. 8." (*Keil.*) Perhaps Ahithophel was also avenging the wrong done to Bathsheba. (See note on chap. xi. 3.)

Ver. 22. "**The top of the house.**" The same roof where David's look at Bathsheba led him into the path of sin.

Ver. 23. "**The oracle of God.**" That is, the counsel of Ahithophel had almost the weight of a Divine command with both father and son.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–4.

The Treachery of Ziba.

I. Benevolent acts are often performed from motives of policy and sometimes at another man's expense. Although it is not our business at all times to inquire minutely into the sources whence men obtain the means of doing deeds of charity and apparent kindness, or to be severe in passing judgment upon them, the interests of truth and justice sometimes demand such an investigation and sentence. For instance, in olden times, the smuggler and the highwayman were sometimes lavish in giving of the fruits of their dishonesty to the poor and needy, but in doing so they gave what did not belong to them and therefore deserved blame, and not praise. And men now-a-days often give away what they have gotten by means quite as unlawful, though more outwardly respectable. We can hardly suppose that in any such case what is given is given from a right motive. In the case of Ziba, the motive for his liberality was evidently as corrupt as its source. We cannot believe that he was prompted by the same feelings as were David's other benefactors. The character of the man forbids such a supposition, and we must conclude that he was farsighted enough to see that David would be victorious, and credulous enough to think that he would not discover his falsehood. Like the unjust steward of our Lord's parable, he could well afford to be generous at his master's expense, and although his selfishness might be less palpable, his dishonesty warrants us in concluding it was quite as real.

II. The best of men often err in their judgment of others. David here looks upon Ziba as his true friend, and upon Mephibosheth as a most ungrateful man. In this we know he was altogether mistaken, yet how entirely were appearances in favour of his opinion. In these days, in a civilized country, a man could not suffer such a wrong as Mephibosheth here suffered at the hand of David, for he would not be condemned without an opportunity of defending himself, but in other forms men often suffer much from the calumny and mistakes of others. A wicked and designing person, for his own selfish ends, falsely accuses a good man to his friend, the accused person is ignorant of the charge, circumstances seem against him, and the very esteem in which his friend has hitherto held him seems to increase his indignation at the supposed treachery. For, if David had not had so great a regard for Mephibosheth, he would not have been stung so keenly by his supposed desertion, and probably would not have so hastily passed so severe a sentence upon him. In view of his error let us learn to be slow in believing evil of any, especially of those whom we have hitherto had reason to regard as honest and true, and let us be thankful that above and over all human judges there is One who cannot err in His judgment, because "*He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, neither reprove* (decide) *after the hearing of His ears*, but will *judge with righteousness and reprove* (decide) *with equity.*" (Isa. xi. 3, 4).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 4. Flatterers are generally backbiters; for it is as easy to them to forge slanders of the absent as to pretend affection and respect for the present. . . . . When much treachery and ingratitude have been experienced, men are apt to become too suspicious, and to listen to every plausible tale of calumny. The mind being greatly agitated, views

everything through a false medium, and we are naturally most precipitate when least capable of judging aright.—*Scott.*

There is often more danger, and therefore more need of caution, with those who profess an especial regard for us, than with those who are avowed enemies. It is the remark of an old writer (*Fuller*), that "Ziba's gifts did David more harm than Shimei's curses, for those betrayed him into an act of injustice, whilst these reproved his patience."—*Lindsay.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5–19.

Shimei cursing David.

I. The day of adversity is the day when we may look for insult from the mean-spirited. We hear nothing of Shimei in the day of David's prosperity, although the deeds for which he upbraided him had been done long before. A truly noble man will reprove another from a sense of duty, and will do it without considering what the consequences to himself may be. There are also many men who, although they will not risk their own safety by rebuking the real or supposed faults of those who have power to punish them for so doing, have too much humanity in them to do so when their respective positions are reversed. But, alas for our human nature! there are those also who, like the cur, which only barks when he thinks the object of his dislike has no means of defence, gladly avail themselves of another's misfortune to charge him with all manner of iniquity. Although David, as it appears from the narrative, had even now the means of avenging himself, it is quite evident from what took place afterwards that Shimei would not have acted as he did if he had not felt tolerably secure.

II. The manner and circumstances in which an accusation is made, and the spirit in which it is borne, will often help us to decide as to its truth or falsehood. If we knew nothing of David before this event, as we know nothing of Shimei, we should conclude that he did not deserve the character here given to him. Great as his fall had been on the one great transgression of his life, the charges brought against him by Shimei were false—he was not a blood-thirsty tyrant who had risen to power by injustice and cruelty. But where there is manifest cowardice, we may safely conclude—without any other proof—that there is falsehood. The more meekly, too, an accusation is borne, the less likely is it to be true, Such a spirit as David here displays never goes hand in hand with such selfish ambition as Shimei here lays to his charge, and the accuser here is as surely condemned out of his own mouth, and by his own conduct, as the accused man justifies himself by his humble words and by his patient forbearance.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 5. There is no small cruelty in the picking out of a time for mischief; that word would scarce gall at one season, which at another killeth. The same shaft flying with the wind pierces deep, which against it can hardly find strength to stick upright. The valour and justice of children condemn it for injuriously cooperating against their adversary when he is once down. It is the murder of the tongue to insult upon those whom God hath humbled, and to draw blood of that back which is yet blue from the hand of the Almighty.—*Bp. Hall.*

Was not David rightly punished by Shimei's railing, for his hearkening so readily to Ziba's flattering? Was not

he justly spoiled of his honours, who had so unjustly spoiled Mephibosheth of his good?—*Trapp.*

Ver. 11. Even while David laments the rebellion of his son, he gains by it, and makes that the argument of his patience, which was the exercise of it: "Behold my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it?" The wickedness of an Absalom may rob his father of comfort, but shall help to add to his father's goodness. It is the advantage of great crosses, that they swallow up the less. One man's sin cannot be excused by another's, the lesser by the greater. If Absalom be a traitor, Shimei may not curse and rebel; but the passion conceived from the indignity of a stranger, may be abated by the harder measure of our own; if we can therefore suffer, because we have suffered, we have profited by our affliction. A weak heart faints with every addition of succeeding trouble; the strong recollects itself, and is grown so skilful, that it bears off one mischief with another.—*Bp. Hall.*

Ver. 12. According to His usual dealing with His poor afflicted. Howsoever, if He bring not down His will to theirs, He will bring up their will to His, which will make infinite amends for all their patience.—*Trapp.*

We may here learn how falsely and wickedly men sometimes wrest the providence of God, to justify their unjust surmises, and gratify their malevolent passions. Many who are themselves living without God in the world, have, at the same time, no scruple in speaking of the calamities which befal others, as Divine judgments. . . Job's friends condemned him on this false principle, and our Lord censures a similar rash judgment which some in His day had formed of certain others, in consequence of their extraordinary sufferings.—*Lindsay.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20–23.

Ahithophel's Counsel.

I. When all the plans of the wicked have been worked out, God's counsel will be found to prevail. Sometimes a man may permit a thief to escape from his grasp and run away from him because he knows that in front of him is a precipice, and that every step he takes brings him nearer to his final fall. He has only to let him pursue his own course and he will be the author of his own ruin. So, when men break away from God, and seem to think they can leave Him out of their calculations, He sometimes leaves them entirely to their own devices, and they become their own destroyers, and at the same time fulfil the Divine purposes. At this crisis in the history of the people of Israel it might have seemed to some good men that God had entirely withdrawn from the nation, and that these bad men were having their own way in everything. The last assumption was true, but not the first—Ahithophel and Absalom met with no hindrance as yet in the execution of their designs, but God was looking on and seeing in them the instruments of His will, as they unconsciously executed a part of the sentence against David. (chap. xii. 11).

II. The sin which the parent commits in secret will probably be committed openly by the child. Children show themselves apt pupils in the school of vice, and often go far beyond their teachers in the wrong direction. None of David's virtues were reproduced in Absalom, but his deed of sin was not only closely imitated but far exceeded, and what the father did in secret the son did not blush to do in the sight of all Israel. Let no parent or any man deceive himself by thinking that those under his influence will stop in the path of sin just

where he stopped—it is a downward road and they who set out upon it neither know where they will stop themselves, nor can they stay the course of those who may follow in their steps. Let the father or mother who breaks God's law and blushes for the sin, think how likely it is that their child may make a boast of the same deed of shame.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It is not improbable that Ahithophel remembered God's denunciation against David by the prophet Nathan, and therefore considered it a deep stroke of policy thus to take advantage of existing circumstances, to establish the Divine purposes. He might hope perhaps, thus to encourage a belief, that Absalom was a chosen instrument in the hands of God for the execution of His judgments, and consequently, that all opposition to him was both wicked and fruitless. But Ahithophel with all his wisdom, was not wise enough to know that the rule of man's conduct is not the secret purposes, but the revealed precepts of God; that a man may be fulfilling the former, yet incurring God's severe displeasure by transgressing the latter.—*Lindsay.*

Ver. 23. David's chief counsellors were God's testimonies (Psa. cxix. 24) to these as to the test he brought all counsel given him, whether by Ahithophel or any other . . . Absalom and his adherents followed Ahithophel's counsel, howsoever, as infallible, because it was for their purpose.—*Trapp.*

CHAPTER XVII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES. Ver. 1. "**This night.**" "**The night following David's flight** and Absalom's entrance into Jerusalem, as we may see very clearly from ver. 16." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 3. "**Bring back,**" "Ahithophel regards Absalom's government as the only lawful one to which those fugitives must submit; their flight is in his eyes an act of insubordination, from which they are to be *brought back.*"—(*Erdmann and others*). "**The man whom thou seekest,**" etc. This is a very obscure phrase, but many expositors understand it to mean—"*the removal of David is tantamount to the return of all the people to thee.*"

Ver. 7. "**At this time.**" "His former advice was good (chap. xvi. 21), but not this."

Ver. 8. "**Will not lodge,**" etc. So that it would be impossible to surprise and slay *him*, as Ahithophel suggests.

Ver. 9 "**Some of them be overthrown,**" etc. Hushai suggests that David, from his hiding place will surprise and defeat Absalom's followers. "It is likely that Absalom was not a man of courage, and Hushai, knowing this, adroitly magnified the terror of the prowess of David and his men." (*Biblical Commentary*).

Ver. 11. "**Thine own person.**" Hushai insinuates that Ahithophel by his counsel had been indulging in an egotistical vaunting. Ahithophel had said, "*I* will arise; *I* will come upon him," etc.; and he insinuates also that Ahithophel had been desirous of robbing Absalom of the glory of the victory over David, and of assuming it to himself. And thus Hushai practises on Absalom's vain glory and self love. (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 12. "**As the dew.**" "This figure, together with that of the *sand*, fitly sets forth the swift and quiet settling of the huge host upon the enemy. And with this accords perfectly the statement of the success of the attack." (*Erdmann*).

Ver 13. "**Draw it into the river.**" A bold hyperbole, designed to produce a momentary effect.

Ver. 14. "**The Lord had appointed,**" etc. "All that Hushai had said about the bravery and heroism of David and his followers was well founded. The deception lay in the assumption that all the people from Dan to Beersheba would crowd around Absalom as one man; whereas it might easily be foreseen that after the first excitement of the revolution was over, and greater calmness ensued, a large part of the nation and army would gather around David. But such a possibility as this never entered into the minds of Ahithophel and his supporters. It was in this that the Divine sentence was seen." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 16. "**The plains,**" Rather, the *fords* or *ferries.* "**Lest the king,**" etc. *Lit.*, *lest there be a swallowing up.* "Either destruction *to the king*, it will fall upon him, or, if we supply the subject from the previous clause, that it (the transit) may not be swallowed up or cut off from the king." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 17. "**En-rogel.**" Or "*Fuller's fountain.*" Many identify this with the modern fountain of Job, or Nehemiah, situated at the junction of the Valleys of Kedron and Hinnon, but Josephus describes the incident recorded in 1 Kings i. 9, as taking place in the royal garden, and Dr. Bonar identifies En-rogel with the present "Fountain of the Virgin," the perennial source from which the pool of Siloam is supplied. Among other arguments in favour of this view he remarks that the fountain of Job is a *well* and not a *spring*, and that it is too far off from Jerusalem and from the road over Olivet to Jordan and too much in view of the city to meet the requirements of this chapter. Mr. Grove (*Biblical Dictionary*) adds to these considerations the fact that the Fountain of the Virgin is still the great resort of the women of Jerusalem for washing and treading their clothes, and that *Rogel* is generally held to be derived from the Hebrew *Ragel* to *tread.* "**Wench.**" Hebrew, *the maid servant*, one belonging to the high priest's household.

Ver. 18. "**A well.**" "**A cistern, then empty. It seems to have been summer time.**" (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 19. "**The woman.**" The man's wife. "**Ground corn.**" Groats or peeled barley. The article before the noun indicates that she was occupied at the time with the grain. Josephus says she laid fleeces of wool over the men.

Ver. 21. "**The water,**" *i.e.*, the Jordan. "The circumstances of that distressing flight, aggravated by the lone hour of midnight, and the roar of the numerous cataracts of the Jordan, are graphically depicted in Psalms xlii. and xliii., which, although bearing the name of the sons of Korah, represent vividly and fully the feelings of the disconsolate but pious monarch." (*Jamieson.*) "**Mahanaim.**" (See on chap. ii. 8.) "Probably a fortified city." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 25. "**An Israelite.**" Rather, as in 1 Chron. ii. 17, an *Ishmaelite.* He was an illegitimate son. "From the description here given of Abigail as a daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah, not of David, some of the earlier commentators have very justly concluded that Abigail and Zeruiah were only step-sisters of David, *i.e.*, daughters of his mother by Nahash and not by Jesse." (*Keil*). Otherwise we must either take Nahash as a *woman's* name or as another name for David's father.

Ver. 27. "**Shobi.**" "Possibly a son of Nahash, the deceased king of the Ammonites, and brother of Hanun, who was defeated by David (chap. x. 1), and one of those to whom David had shown kindness when Rabbah was taken." (*Keil*). "**Machir.**" (See chap. ix. 4.) "**Rogelim.**" Only mentioned here and in chap. xix. 32, and otherwise unknown.

Ver. 28. "**Basons.**" Metal vessels for cooking.

Ver. 29. "**Butter.**" "Rather, curdled milk, which being mixed with the honey, forms a light and refreshing beverage." (Song Sol. iv. 11). (*Jamieson*). "**Cheese of kine.**" "Slices of coagulated milk." (*Jamieson*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1-24.

The Death of Ahithophel.

The account given here of Ahithophel is very brief, and is a record of only a few weeks of his life, yet it is enough to enable us to see what manner of man he was. He exhibits in a large degree three characteristics found in most godless men—in men who are not governed by a desire to please God—who are, in fact, so far as it is possible, a law unto themselves.

I. They are fickle men. If self-interest be the guiding principle of a man's life, even his most intimate acquaintance can never be quite certain what his next step in life may be. For a man who makes his temporal well-being the pole-star of life will not be sure long together which is the road to it. What may seem expedient to-day may appear inexpedient to-morrow, and he will often be found giving up the pursuit of one prize to follow after another which looks more tempting. The downward road is not only broad, but it has many by-paths and windings, so that one never knows exactly where to find him who walks in it. Only the man who follows after righteousness—who takes God and his conscience for his guides, can be safely trusted in as unchangeable in the great purpose and direction of his life. Ahithophel had been implicitly trusted by David, and there had doubtless been a time when it would have seemed impossible to others and perhaps to himself that he should even be found among the king's enemies. But circumstances had changed, and Ahithophel had changed his front with them.

II. They are proud men. This sin is, perhaps, at the root of all ungodliness, for it was the sin of the angels that kept not their first estate and "is," says Thomas Adams, "the first thing that lives and the last that dies in us." In some form or other it is a characteristic of all ungodly souls, leading them, as it did Ahithophel, to be mortified at any depreciation of themselves and their doings, and oftentimes hurrying them on to some desperate deed of wickedness. While their wishes are followed and their advice sought before all others, they are content and active, but as soon as they meet with a check they are driven by conflicting passions like a vessel struck by cross seas, and like it, shipwreck is often the end. Like every other form of ungodliness, pride is a foolish passion which recoils upon him who gives it the mastery over him. The counsel of Ahithophel had hitherto been as the oracle of God, first to David and then to Absalom, but a little reflection might have shown him that his present master was, like himself, governed by no sense of duty or motives of gratitude, and was not likely to be more true to him than he himself had been to David. It was then very unlikely that Absalom would give him unlimited control over the rebellion any longer than his supposed interest was served by it. This is the way of the world, and he who does not take it into account in the shaping of his life is as unwise a man as he who puts out to sea expecting no contrary winds. But it is only in the service of the world that pride can be gratified at all; there is no place for it in the service of God. Pride, then, in all cases, as in the one before us, "goeth before destruction"—the destruction of the proud man's schemes and sometimes of himself.

III. They are cowardly men. What a despicable exodus from the world does Ahithophel make! He is afraid to face the consequences of his own actions. Probably the rebellion would never have gone to the length which it did if Ahithophel had not been associated with it, and now, at the most critical point he leaves it to the direction of others, because he foresees its defeat. How different is the attitude of a man who embarks in an enterprise from a godly motive! He knows that he is not responsible for its success or failure, but only for his own faithfulness unto the end, and as he has not undertaken the cause to promote his own ends or gratify personal ambition, his own fate is the last thing that he thinks about. This enables him to meet reverses with fortitude and to be defeated without being disgraced. But those who are prompted by Ahithophel's motives find themselves in the day of adversity destitute of that sustaining principle without which there can be no true and lasting courage, and often close very ignominiously a career which was once influential and prosperous.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 5. It was not unwise in Absalom to seek the advice of another experienced counsellor also (Prov. xxiv. 6); his fault was that he did not know which advice to follow, and was misled by high sounding and flattering words. In choosing counsellors, and in judging of their counsel, lies great part of the wisdom of life.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

Ver. 23. What a mixture do we find here of wisdom and madness! Ahithophel will needs hang himself; there is madness: he will yet set his house in order; there is an act of wisdom. And could it be possible that he, who was so wise as to set his house in order, should be so mad as to hang himself? that he should be careful to order his house, who regarded not to order his impotent passions? that he should care for his house who cared not for either body or soul? How vain it is for a man to be wise, if he be not wise in God! How preposterous are the cares of idle worldlings, that prefer all other things to themselves, and, while they look at what they have in their coffers, forget what they have in their breasts!—*Bp. Hall.*

This is the first recorded case of deliberate suicide. Saul, already mortally wounded on the battle-field, fell upon his sword, but this is the earliest instance in history of premeditated self-murder. Perhaps there was a mingling of remorse with those other emotions of pride. He had left a master who loved and valued him, who, indeed, regarded him as his equal and guide, and he had transferred his services to one who, as he now discovered, had not the wisdom to appreciate his worth, but preferred the gaudy glitter of empty rhetoric to the substantial wisdom of unadorned speech. This contrast, thus forced upon him, might awaken his conscience to the value of the friendship which he had forfeited when he turned against David, until at length remorse and shame so overwhelmed him, that, like a deeper traitor, of whom he was only the feeble prototype, he could not endure life, and hurried himself into eternity. It never occurred to him to ask, "If I cannot face David, how shall I look upon Jehovah?"—*Dr. Taylor.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 25-29.

DAVID AT MAHANAIM.

I. That help is the most effectual which is most fitted to supply the present need. Although the seat of David's distress at this time was in the mind rather than in the body, the goodwill of his friends in Gilead could have been expressed in no more acceptable manner at this moment than by giving to him and his followers food and the means of bodily rest. The events of the past day must have told greatly upon David's body, and he, in common with the most ordinary man, must sometimes submit to be at the mercy of his animal organism. He was at this moment most likely incapable of appreciating anything of a spiritual nature so highly as this kindly provision for his material wants. That is the true and real sympathy which discerns the most pressing need of the present moment, and hastens to supply it to the best of its ability. For those wrung with the deepest anguish of soul cannot ignore the demands of the body, and solace to a wounded spirit sometimes enters by this channel. When Elijah, in bitterness of soul, lay down in the wilderness and prayed for death, the first step which God took to restore his spiritual strength was to provide food for his body (1 Kings xix. 6–8). The goodwill, also, which is expressed by such a ministration, is a direct balm to a soul in sorrow.

II. Even self-love should prompt men to a generous treatment of those beneath them. The reversals of position which are continually taking place in human life ought to teach men wisdom in this matter. Human beings are continually changing places, the servant becomes the master, and he who rules to-day may soon be at the mercy of those whom he now commands. When David set the crown of Ammon upon his own head (chap. xii. 30) it did not seem likely that in a few years he would be a fugitive from his kingdom and indebted to the good offices of an Ammonite prince. But this had now come to pass, and any kindness which he then showed to those whom he conquered was now returned with interest, or, if he had upon that occasion been unduly harsh, the magnanimity of Nahash must have smitten him with remorse. If we would in adversity receive the favours of others without self-reproach we must beware lest in prosperity we forget the claims of those over whom for a time God has exalted us.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

The same God that raised enmity to David from his own loins, procured him favour from foreigners: strangers shall relieve him, whom his own son persecutes: here is not a loss, but an exchange of love. Had Absalom been a son of Ammon, and Shobi a son of David, David had found no cause of complaint. If God takes with one hand, he gives with another; while that divine bounty serves us in good meat, though not in our dishes, we have good reason to be thankful. No sooner is David come to Mahanaim, than Barzillai, Machir, and Shobi, refresh him with provisions. Who ever saw any child of God left utterly destitute? Whosoever be the messenger of our aid, we know whence he comes: heaven shall want power, and earth means, before any of the household of faith shall want maintenance.—*Bp. Hall.*

The *faithfulness* of *human love* is not only the *copy*, but also the *means* and *instrument* of the *Divine love*, granted to those who bow humbly beneath God's hand and wholly trust Him.—*Lange's Commentary.*

David was received with kindness in the land of Gilead, on the east of Jordan, at a time when he was driven by his own son out of his own capital, Jerusalem, in his own tribe. The Jews rejected Christ, but the gospel was gladly received by Samaritans (Acts viii. 4–6) and by the Gentiles (Acts xiii. 46–48; xxviii. 28).—*Wordsworth.*

It has been conjectured with much probability that as the first sleep of that evening was commemorated in the fourth Psalm, so in the third is expressed the feeling of David's thankfulness at the final close of those twenty-four hours, of which every detail has been handed down, as if with the consciousness of their importance at the time. He had "laid him down in peace" that night and slept; for in that great defection of man "the Lord alone had caused him to dwell in safety." The tradition of the Septuagint ascribes the 143rd Psalm to the time "when his son was pursuing him." Some at least of its contents might well belong to that night (verses 2, 8). There is another group of Psalms, the 41st, the 55th, the 69th, and the 109th, in which a long popular belief has seen an amplification of David's bitter cry, "O Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." Many of the circumstances agree. The dreadful imprecations in these Psalms—unequalled for vehemence in any other part of the sacred writings—correspond with the passion of David's own expressions. The greatness, too, of Ahithophel himself in the history is worthy of the importance ascribed to the object of those awful maledictions. That oracular wisdom which made his house a kind of shrine (chap. xv. 31) seems to move the spirit of the sacred writer with an involuntary admiration.

Everywhere he is treated with a touch of awful reverence. When he dies, the interest of the plot ceases, and his death is given with an awful grandeur, quite unlike the mixture of the terrible and the contemptible which has sometimes gathered round the end of those whom the religious sentiment of mankind has placed under its ban. When "he hanged himself, and died" he was buried, not like an excommunicated outcast, but like a venerable Patriarch 'in the sepulchre of his father.'"—*Stanley.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

Critical and Expository Notes. Ver. 1. "**David numbered,**" etc. "The hardy mountaineers of Gilead came in great numbers at the call of their chieftains."—(*Jamieson.*) Josephus says the army numbered about 4000.

Ver. 6. The situation of this battle-ground is much disputed. Erdmann thinks the name can be understood only of the forest covering the mountains of Ephraim mentioned in Josh. xvii. 15-18, and Keil agrees with him; but against this view the majority of writers on the subject urge the statement that Absalom encamped in Gilead (chap. xvii. 26.), and the fact that the army returned to Mahanaim after the battle (chap. xix. 3, 15). The expression in verse 3, "*that thou succour us out of the city*" is also strongly in favour of the assumption that the battle took place in Gilead. But if so, there is no satisfactory answer to the question why the site bore this designation. Mr. Groves suggests (*Bib. Dict.*) that the forest may have been so called after this battle on account of the conspicuous part which the tribe of Ephraim probably took in the rebellion. Grotius suggests that the name was derived from the slaughter of the Ephraimites by Jephthah in the neighbourhood (Judges xii. 1-3), and Dean Stanley and others, that there was a settlement of Ephraim there in connection with the neighbouring brother tribe of Manasseh.

Ver 7. "**People of Israel.**" "This designation, together with the immense slaughter afterwards, shows the large extent to which the people were enlisted in this unhappy civil contest."—(*Jameison.*) "**Twenty thousand men.**" It is commonly supposed that Absalom's army was far larger than David's. . . . A great loss, yet not improbable under the circumstances. The victory may be accounted for by the superior organisation of David's troops and the superior generalship of his army-leaders."—(*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 8. "**The wood devoured.**" "Most likely the woody region was full of ravines, precipices, and marshes, into which the flying foe was pursued, and where so many perished."—(*Keil*).

Ver. 9. "**Met.**" Rather, *Came upon, found himself among.* "**A mule.**" *Lit.* "upon *the* mule." Josephus says that it was the king's mule. Compare 1 Kings i. 33, 38, 44, where the riding upon the king's mule is represented as an act of royal authority.—(*Wordsworth*). "**Oak.**" "*Terebinth.*" "Probably *Quercus Ægilope*, Valonia Oak, for which Gilead and Bashan were famous."—*Jameison.* "**Caught hold.**" *Lit., made itself fast in.* There is no mention made here of the *hair* of Absalom being the cause of his entanglement. *That* would be covered by his helmet.

Ver. 11. "**A girdle.**" "A girdle, curiously and richly wrought, was among the ancient Hebrews a mark of honour, and sometimes bestowed as a reward of military merit." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 13. "**Otherwise,**" etc. Rather, "*Or, had I dealt deceitfully against his life, i.e.*, have wrought falsehood by killing him, inasmuch as I should then have acted against the express prohibition of the king. The words, '*and nothing is hid from the king*,' form a parenthesis; the apo-dosis begins with, '*and thou.*'" (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 14. "**Darts.**" The Hebrew word means a sharp, wooden staff. "This explains the reason for his taking *three*, whereas one javelin or dart would have been sufficient; and also the fact that Absalom was not slain, notwithstanding their being thrust at his heart. The last clause of this verse belongs to what follows:—"*Still living in the midst of the terebinth, ten young men,*" etc. (*Keil.*)

Ver. 17. "**Laid.**" Rather, *threw.* "The people of the East indicate their detestation of the memory of an infamous person by throwing stones at the place where he is buried. The

heap is increased by the gradual accumulation of stones which passers-by add to it." (*Jamieson.*) (See also, Joshua viii. 26, 29). "**All Israel.**" Absalom's army.

Ver. 18. "**The king's dale.**" The valley of the Kidron, or Jehoshaphat, so called from the events recorded in Gen. xiv. 17. "**No son.**" Those mentioned in chap. xiv. 27 must have died, or were born after the erection of the pillar. "**Absalom's place.**" *Lit.*, hand, that which pointed him out. "And perhaps, also, as being his handiwork." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 21. "**Cushi.**" It is uncertain whether this is a proper name for an Israelite, or whether it signifies a descendant of Cush. "The form of the name rather favours the latter view, in which case it would suggest the idea of a Moorish slave in the service of Joab." (*Keil.*) "He sent an Ethiopian, thinking it small damage if he received hurt of the king." (*Grotius.*)

Ver. 22. "**No tidings ready.**" "*The message is not a reward—bringing one.*" (*Erdmann.*) "*Thou wilt not carry a good message.*" (*Luther.*) "Thou *hast not idings sufficient*," that is—"The Cushite has already carried the news." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 23. "**The plain.**" The Jordan valley. Those who contend that the battle was fought on the west of the Jordan, think that this statement confirms their view. But those who favour the general opinion, contend that if the battle were on the eastern side of the river, Ahimaaz might still have found a quicker way to Mahanaim by way of the Jordan valley; and that the expression intimates that Cushi did *not* take that route which he would have done, had he been on the west of Jordan,

Ver. 24. "**The two gates.**" "The outer and inner gate of the fortified city wall, between which there was a small court." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 25. "**Tidings.**" "*Good tidings.*" If the army had been defeated there would have been many as fugitives.

Ver. 27. "**Good man.**" One whom Joab would not have sent as a messenger of evil.

Ver. 28. "**All is well.**" Heb. *Shalom, Peace!* The usual Hebrew salutation.

Ver. 33. "**The chamber,**" etc. A sequestered part of the building to which a person can retire for meditation and undisturbed solitude." (*Dr. Shaw.*) "**O my son.**" "To understand this passionate utterance of anguish, we must bear in mind not only the excessive tenderness, or rather weakness, of David's paternal affection for his son, but also his anger that Joab and his generals should have paid so little regard to his command to deal gently with Absalom. With the king's excitable temperament, this entirely prevented him from taking a just and correct view of the crime of his rebel son, which merited death, and of the penal justice of God which had been manifest in his destruction." (*Keil.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

The Death of Absalom.

I. The wicked are successful only until they have fulfilled God's purposes. Hitherto all Absalom's plans had prospered. Great numbers—possibly a large majority (see note on verse 7) of the people of Israel—had gathered to his standard; he had entered the capital without resistance and had apparently secured an efficient leader of his army. So far he was allowed to proceed without check, because he was the instrument in God's hand of executing His sentence upon David. But his mission was now fulfilled. David had received his chastisement with becoming submission, and given full evidence of his sincere and hearty repentance, and now God has no more work for Absalom to do, and permits so insignificant a thing as the branch of a tree to seize and hold him until he receives the doom he deserves. This is the lot of all ungodly men. Unwilling to be workers *with* God—having no sympathy with His desires and aims—they shall yet unconsciously work *for* Him, while they follow the lead of their own unlawful passions. In this sense God called Nebuchadnezzar his "servant" (Jer. xxv., 9; xxvii., 6; xliii., 10) because while he was pursuing his own ambitious designs, he was unconsciously inflicting the

chastisement necessary to Israel's moral restoration; but when he and his descendants had accomplished the work their power was given into other hands. It is ever so when the rulers of the world take "*counsel against the Lord and against His anointed*" (Psa. ii.)—for a time all their plans seem to prosper, but when they have fulfilled the counsel of the most High, the word goes forth:—"*Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.*" (Job xxxviii. 11.)

II. There are depths of human affection which no ingratitude can exhaust. The strength of human love is measured by the demands made upon it. We cannot certify that the well is deep from which we only draw a few buckets of water, but if it yields abundantly after an unusual demand has been made upon it, we know certainly that it must be fed from an almost inexhaustible source. There is an ordinary natural affection which will bear an ordinary strain, but gives way under the pressure of great unkindness or even neglect. But, as in the case of David, there is a human love so strong and deep that no cruelty can dry it up or even lessen its intensity. If Absalom had been David's most dutiful son he could have scarcely uttered a more pathetic lament over him; although he had received at his hands as much dishonour and insult as it was possible for one man to offer to another, the father's heart still acknowledges the tie between them and first tries to save the traitor's life and then bitterly mourns the failure of his effort. Perhaps no man could thus retain his tenderness towards an erring child unless he had himself been made sensible of the love of the Divine Father towards himself, a deep consciousness of our own ingratitude to God and of His infinite patience and mercy to us must make us long-suffering and pitiful, and even loving towards those who sin against us. This sense of the love of God is the living spring whence must flow unfailing springs of tenderness towards all men, and especially towards those related to us by natural ties, and streams so fed are not dried up by their wrong-doing. David's love, we know, was fed by such a fountain, and hence its depth and strength.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 4. So meekly doth David submit himself to the will of his men. Affliction and meekness grow both on the same root in a holy tongue.—*Trapp.*

Vers. 1–4. Whatever fears of Divine desertion might occasionally darken the soul of David, between the day of his flight and the battle, it is certain that these visitations of alarm did not restrain him from prayer. . . . The immediate answer to prayer, in the present emergency, consisted to a large extent in the spirit of wisdom and counsel poured out upon David and his friends. Every step they took was taken with prudence, while every movement of their opponents was a blunder. It was wise in David, as we have already seen, to cross the Jordan and retire to Gilead; it was wise in him to make Mahanaim his head-quarters; it was wise, as we shall by and bye see to have a wood in the neighbourhood of the battle-field; and it was wise too, to make the arrangements that were actually adopted, in expectation of the enemy's attack. . . . It is instructive to mark this; because there is a lurking feeling in the minds of some, that it is not so proper to pray for wisdom as for other and more spiritual gifts. And yet it is very certain that sound discretion is one of the gifts we are most specially invited to ask, and which believers through the merits of Christ, may most certainly expect.—*Blaikie.*

Vers. 4–8. Easy gained, easy lost.

Absalom's example shows that. And to-day also, in great as in small things, how can it be otherwise?—*Schlier.*

Ver. 10. When the hour of Absaloms's calamities arrived it found him without a single friend! Even Saul had his armour-bearer at his side when he fled over the mountains of Gilboa; but not an armour-bearer, not a servant, not a friend, not a single human being attended Absalom as he hastened from the battle-field. It could hardly be that he was last of all his army. Riding on a mule, he must have made more speed than most. Many of those who flocked to his standard must have passed him as he hung with his hair entangled in the prickly oak; but not one would spare the time to help him: intent on saving himself, each one left him to his fate. The world has seldom witnessed a more striking instance of retribution than in the fate of Absalom. As Saul had destroyed all the wizards in the land, and could hardly find one when he desired their help; so Absalom had made havoc of the loyal *hearts* of the kingdom, and when he needed a loyal heart not one could he obtain. If he had secured but one heart by honest means, it would have served him in better stead than all that he had stolen.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 14. It was the purpose of the Lord that Absalom should perish, and in the person of Joab God found a fitting instrument for carrying His purpose into effect. How often have we occasion to remark the intrepid boldness of the ways of Providence. The mind of God is a wonderful combination of qualities; with a tenderness more soft than that of the most affectionate woman, it combines a courage more fearless than that of the most iron-hearted warrior. When once it appears to God that some dreadful blow is necessary for the greater good of an individual or the world, He advances to strike it with an unhesitating and unshrinking step . . . . . But it is not always when such things must be done that God finds an instrument for doing them, animated by the same spirit of mingled firmness and tenderness as Himself. Nay, it is not often that He does so. Firm men are not commonly tender; tender men are not commonly firm. The separation is the usual result of human imperfection. The instruments God has to employ for His sterner judgments are commonly men of little compassion, of firm nerve, and relentless purpose. Such was His instrument in the death of Absalom.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 18. So did Absalom esteem himself, that he thought it would be a wrong to the world to want the memorial of so goodly a person. God had denied him sons; how just it was that he should want a son, who had robbed his father of a son, who would have robbed himself of a father, his father of a kingdom! It had been pity so poisonous a plant should have been fruitful: his pride shall supply nature; he rears up a stately pillar in the king's dale, and calls it by his own name, that he might live in dead stones, who could not survive in living issue; and now behold this curious pile ends in a rude heap, which speaks no language but the shame of that carcass which it covers. Hear this, ye glorious fools, that care not to perpetuate any memory of yourselves to the world, but of ill-deserving greatness; the best of this affectation is vanity; the worst, infamy and dishonour; whereas the memorial of the just shall be blessed: and if his humility shall refuse an epitaph, and choose to hide himself under the bare earth, God Himself shall engrave his name upon the pillar of eternity.

Vers. 9–18. Absalom and David did each his utmost, and showed what he could do; how bad it is possible for a child to be to the best of fathers, and how good it is possible for a father to be to the worst of children; as if it were designed to be a resemblance of man's wickedness towards God, and God's mercy towards man, of which it

is hard to say which is more amazing. —*Henry.*

Heaven-wide opposites that cannot be reconciled. I. *God's strict righteousness,* when the measure of His holy wrath is full, and *human compassion,* when the measure of Divine patience and long-suffering is full. II. Rude *exercise of power,* which in self-will and recklessness destroys a human life, and tender *conscientiousness,* which fears to strive against God by attempts upon a human life. III. The *honour,* which man in his pride prepares for himself before the world, and the *shame,* with which God punishes such pride.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Justly was he lift up to the oak, who had lift up himself against his father and sovereign; justly is he pierced with darts, who had pierced his father's heart with so many sorrows; justly is he mangled, who hath dismembered and divided all Israel; justly is he stoned, who not only cursed, but pursued his own parent.—*Bp. Hall.*

What is this we hear? that he, whose life Israel valued at ten thousand of theirs, should be exchanged with a traitor's: that a good king, whose life was sought, should wish to lay it down for the preservation of his murderer. The best men have not wont to be the least passionate. But what shall we say to that love of thine, O Saviour, who hast said of us wretched traitors, not "Would God I had died for you!" but, I will die, I do die, I have died for you. O love, like thyself, infinite, incomprehensible, whereat the angels of heaven stand yet amazed, wherewith thy saints are ravished!—*Bp. Hall.*

When the infant of Bathsheba died, he could say, "I shall go to him;" but on this occasion there is no such comforting assurance. Absalom's sun had gone down in thickest darkness; no one ray of hope remained to relieve the gloom of his father's heart; and none but those who have been called to mourn in similar circumstances can tell how bitter is a grief like that.

But worse than either of these ingredients in this cup of anguish would be, as I think, the consciousness in David's heart, that if he had himself been all he ought to have been, his son might not thus have perished. Was there no connection between his own great trespass and Absalom's iniquity? If he had been less foolishly indulgent, Absalom might never have rebelled. Nay, if he had been wiser, even after Absalom's fratricidal guilt, probably he had not stung him into revolt. Such thoughts and questionings as these, would, I doubt not, intensify the sadness of the Psalmist in this trying hour; and it becomes every parent among us to see that in his training of his children, and in his life before them, there is nothing that may tend to ruin them. David now professes, and I believe with truth, to desire that he had died for Absalom; but that was a vain wish. He ought to have lived more for Absalom. He ought, by his own character, to have taught him to love holiness, or, at all events, he ought to have seen that there was nothing in his own conduct to encourage his son in wickedness or to provoke him to wrath; and then, though Absalom had made shipwreck, he might have had the consolation that he had done his utmost to prevent such a catastrophe.—*Taylor.*

We must bring David's terrible grief to the standard of God's Word, and try to apportion to it in due measure its need of praise and of blame. To begin with the least agreeable element. We cannot but be struck with the absence of what had kept him so calm in the climax of his public trials—the absence of any recognition of the hand of God, and of any expression of submission to his will. . . . His uncontrolled vehemence confirms a former remark, that in domestic matters, the Divine will was not regarded as his rule so much as in his public undertakings. It was not so regarded actively in considering what ought to be done, nor passively, in bearing what had to be borne. . . . In the agony of his private grief he forgot the public welfare of his kingdom. Noble and generous though the wish was—"Would God I had died

for thee"—it was not on public grounds a wish that could be justified.—*Blaikie.*

David mourning over Absalom. I. Wherein it was *right.* (*a*) Parent love is indestructible. (*b*) Absalom was not wholly bad, and his faults had been aggravated by the misconduct of others. (*c*) David was conscious that all this was a chastening required by his own sin. II. Wherein it was *wrong.* (*a*) In that it excluded gratitude to his faithful and brave followers. (*b*) In preventing attention to the pressing duties of his position. (*c*) In causing him to overlook the fact that so long as Absalom lived the kingdom could have no peace. (*d*) In so far as it was not tempered by submission to the will of Jehovah.—*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*

CHAPTER XIX.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1, Comp. xviii. 33. **The purpose of the informant was,** "it seems, to explain to Joab and the army why the king did not come forth to greet his returning victorious warriors." (*Erdmann.*)

Vers. 2, 3. "These men's *hearty participation in the sorrow of their beloved king,* for whom they had perilled their lives, soon changed into *gloomy dissatisfaction* at the fact that the king, absorbed in his private grief, did not deign to bestow a look upon them. The description of the manner in which the troops, thus dissatisfied, returned to the city, is pyschologically very fine." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 4. "**Covered his face.**" See on chap. xv. 20. "**A loud voice.**" According to the open and violent mode of expressing grief common in the East (and so also the heroes of the Illiad); there are striking illustrations of this in the Arabian Nights." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 5. "**Thou hast shamed,**" etc. "By deceiving their hopes that thou wouldest rejoice in the victory." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 6 "**I perceive,**" etc. Joab dissects David's words of lamentation with inexorable cruelty, and draws thence with his intellectual acuteness and the grim bitterness of his rude nature, consequences that are seemingly logical, yet lay far from David's nature, though his conduct looked like what he was reproached with." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 7. "**Speak comfortably.**" *Lit., Speak to the heart.* "**There will not tarry one.**" "This threat, grounded as it was on Joab's unbounded popularity with the army, showed him to be a dangerous person; and that circumstance, together with the violation of an express order to deal gently for his sake with Absalom, produced in David's mind a settled hatred, which was strongly manifested in his last directions to Solomon." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 8. "**The people came,**" etc., *i.e.,* "the troops marched before the king, who (as we may supply from the context) manifested his good will both in looks and words" (*Keil*). "**Israel.**" "It is the other tribes, excepting Judah, that are meant." (*Erdmann.*) "**To his tent,**" *i.e.,* gone home. It has been remarked that the use of this expression must have been handed down from the days of the wilderness-journeyings, when Israel did actually dwell in tents.

Ver. 9. "**At strife,**" etc. "The kingdom was completely disorganised. The sentiments of the three different parties are represented in this and the following verse—the royalists, the adherents of Absalom, who had been very numerous, and those who were indifferent to the Davidic dynasty." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 10. "**Why speak ye not?**" "The people are re-assembled after their dispersion; their representatives consult zealously together about the restoration to the throne, to which they had raised the insurgent Absalom by the act of anointing. They reproach one another for doing nothing to restore the king. In their *hearts,* therefore, they *feel* the grievous wrong they have done an anointed of the Lord, as is shown indirectly by their *words,* in which David's great deeds and the terrible misfortunes of the time just past are mentioned." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 11. "Why are ye the last?" "The backwardness of Judah in the movement is explained by the fact that the insurrection started in Judah, and Absalom was first recognised as king in Jerusalem." (*Erdmann.*) "Conscious that they had offended David, and fearing Absalom's garrison in Zion, they did not dare to recall him." (*Cornelius or Lapide.*)

Ver. 13. "Captain of the host," etc. Very different opinions are held concerning this action of David. Ewald considers that it "was not only a wise and politic act, but strictly considered no injustice to Joab, who, long notorious by his military roughness had now shown such disobedience to the royal command in the case of Absalom as could not be pardoned without offence to the royal dignity." On the other hand Keil says, "It was not only unwise, but unjust, to give to Amasa, the traitor-general of the rebels, a promise on oath that he should be commander-in-chief in the place of Joab; for even if the promise was only given privately at first, the fact that it had been given could not remain a secret from Joab very long, and would be sure to stir up his ambition, and lead him to the commission of fresh crimes. . . . For however Joab might have excited David's anger by slaying Absalom, and by the offensive manner in which he had reproved the king, David ought to have suppressed his anger in existing circumstances."

Ver. 14. "The partial severance of the kingdom which David apprehended from the coldness and inaction of Judah, was nearly produced by the sudden impetuosity of their zeal in the cause of royalty." (*Jamieson.*) "Throughout this narrative the tribal feeling which never wholly disappeared, is apparent, see 12, chap. xx. 4, xvi. 8." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary.*)

Ver. 15. "To Jordan." From Mahanaim to the eastern bank of the river. *Gilgal*, west of the Jordan below Jericho. "The place consecrated by the historical associations of Joshua and of Samuel, Josh. v. [illegible]; ix. 6; x. 6; 1 Sam. vii. 16; xv. 33." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 16. "Came down." From the mountainous table-land into the Jordan valley." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 17. "A thousand men." "To show what force he could raise for or against the king." (*Jamieson.*) "They show the consideration which Shimei enjoyed in the tribe of Benjamin, and testify that a change had taken place in the former hostile feeling of this tribe towards David, comp. ver. 31." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 17. "Went over." Rather, "*they hasted or pressed over.*" **"Before the king,"** rather, *in the presence*, etc. They passed over to the eastern bank, probably through a ford.

Ver. 18. "A ferry-boat." "Probably rafts, which are still used on that part of the river. Josephus calls it a bridge of boats." (*Jamieson.*) **"As he was come over."** Keil, Bunsen and others refer this pronoun to David and read "as he (the king) was about," etc. Erdmann understands it to refer to Shimei. Both place the transaction on the eastern bank of the river.

Ver. 29. "The house of Joseph." "The rest of the tribes with the exception of Judah. This designation of the tribes that opposed Judah by the name of the leading tribe (*Joseph.* Josh xvi. 1) was as old as the jealousy between these tribes and Judah, which did not commence with the division of the kingdom but was simply confirmed thereby into a permanent distinction. (*Keil.*) "He might have employed this phrase in order to exculpate his own tribe, by insinuating that it was drawn away by the preponderating influence of the great house of Joseph." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 22. "Ye sons," etc. This expression shows that it was Joab's proposal also. **"Adversaries."** "*Lit.*, a *satan* (See Numb. xxii. 22; comp. Matt. xvi. 23). (*Erdmann.*) **"To-day."** David appears to lay stress upon this word—*to-day*, the day of restoration when he himself was receiving tokens of Divine forgiveness. **"I am this day king."** David will show mercy, not because he has now become king and has the *right* to pardon, but because he sees in his restoration to his kingdom a proof of restoration to the Divine *favour*, and by showing favour to Shemei as his right will fulfil the *obligation* of gratitude to the Lord." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 24. "Dressed his feet," etc. *Lit.*, had not "*made his feet and his beard*," *i.e.*, not washed his feet or arranged his beard. (See Ezek. xxiv. 17). "The Hebrews cut off the hair on the upper lip and cheeks, but in mourning let it grow carelessly, as on the chin. There are various modes of trimming the beard, but whatever the mode it is always done with the greatest care, and a small comb is usually carried for the purpose." (*Jamieson*).

Ver. 25. "He was come to Jerusalem." Most modern expositors read here "*When Jerusalem* (*i.e.*, the inhabitants of the city) *came to meet*, etc. So Kiel and Erdmann. A few change the proposition—*when he was come* from, etc.

Ver. 26. "I will saddle," etc. This is the literal rendering, but as Erdmann remarks "the

lame prince could not have thought of going himself to saddle the ass, and in all languages the expression "to do a thing" is equivalent to have it done. It is therefore better to translate "*I will cause to be saddled.*"

Ver. 27. "**He slandered.**" Mephibosheth had not merely inferred this from David's words, and the tone in which they were spoken, but had certainly found it out long ago, since Ziba would not delay very long to put David's assurance, that all the possessions of Mephibosheth should belong to him, in force against his master." (*Keil*). "**An angel**," etc., *i.e.*, "he sees all just as it really is" (*Keil*) or, "he knows what is truth and right." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 29. "**Why speakest thou,**" etc. Some see in these words of David a disbelief in the explanation of Mephibosheth, and others an expression of displeasure against Ziba. But they seem rather to express David's vexation at his former hasty decision, and, at the same time, his lack of courage to confess himself wholly in the wrong on that occasion.

Ver. 29. "**I have said,**" etc. Some expositors think that David here goes back to the first arrangement mentioned in chap. ix. 7–10., whereby Ziba, as the tiller, would of course have an interest in the produce. But Keil remarks that the words here are directly at variance with the first promise: "*I will restore thee all the land of Saul,*" etc. The half-measure here adopted was, says Erdmann, "only a *half*-exculpation of an innocent man, and David was herein probably controlled by political considerations, being unwilling to make the respectable and influential Ziba his enemy." "Jerome says, that the later Jews believed the division of David's kingdom was an act of retributive justice for the unequal measure awarded to Mephibosheth." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 35. "**Can I discern.**" Perhaps "*intellectually* too dull to be useful as a counsellor." (*Erdmann*) or simply too weak in body to enjoy the luxuries of a court.

Ver. 37. "**Chimham.**" According to Josephus, his son. This is confirmed by 1 Kings ii. 7.

Ver. 40. "**Half Israel.**" "The thousand Benjamites who came with Shimei, and other Israelites who dwelt near." (*Keil and others*).

Ver. 41. "**All the men,**" etc. The representatives of the other tribes. This is generally understood to have taken place at Gilgal.

Ver. 42. "**Have we eaten,**" etc. *i.e.*, Have you reason to be envious of us because we have enjoyed advantages that you were deprived of?" (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 43. "**That our advice,**" Both Keil and Erdmann read here "*And was not my word first to bring back the king.*" From verses 10 and 11, it appears that they were the first to propose David's recall.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–15.

David's Restoration.

I. A good man must beware lest sorrow make him forgetful of duty. David's deep grief at the death of Absalom made him insensible for a time to the claims of both God and man. He has now an abundant answer to his prayer, "O Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness," yet his distress at the means by which his desire is accomplished is so great as to banish from his soul all sense of gratitude to God. The death of the rebel leader was the only way by which peace could be restored to the nation and the throne to the king, and was therefore an event which David should have regarded from other points of view beside the parental one. But, omitting to do this, his natural grief over an unworthy child is allowed to swallow up other emotions which should also have had a place in his soul, and which would have made him more alive to his duty to others. David's fault here is one of which all in similar circumstances should beware. If we allow our thoughts to dwell entirely upon a personal loss, we shall forget both our gains and the gratitude and service we owe to God and our fellow-creatures, and thus show ourselves both self-willed and selfish. Immoderate and absorbing sorrow is a reflection upon

the dealings of God, and no private sorrow can absolve a man from his obligations to others, especially when he has received from them much sympathy and devotion.

II. An ungodly man may sometimes administer needed rebuke to a servant of God. Only men of very high spiritual attainments and well-balanced character behave themselves at all times in such a manner as to deserve no reproach from the ungodly. David was perhaps the most godly man of his age, yet he well-merited the reproof which he now received from the unprincipled Joab. Although exception may be taken to the spirit of Joab's words, none can gainsay their truth. It was altogether unworthy of David to ignore, as he did at this time, the obligations which lay upon him as the anointed king of Israel and the object of so much loyal devotion. A great crisis in the history of the nation had now arrived, and if Joab had not roused him to action the consequences might have been most disastrous. David showed himself a true man by not refusing to listen to truth when spoken in anger; but, having brought Joab's accusations to the bar of conscience, and found himself guilty, he forthwith obeyed the call of duty, although it came to him by so unwelcome a messenger. Herein he manifested the true spirit of a child of God, who should ever be willing to acknowledge himself wrong even when the admission is felt to be very humiliating. But let us bear in mind it should be his aim to be so watchful as not to lay himself open to such reproof as David here merited and received from Joab. It was good neither for David nor for Joab, that the latter should be able more than once to convict the better man of wrong, and it is probably never for the interests of righteousness when a man of God and an unspiritual man stand in such a relation to each other.

III. A policy founded on injustice may have a short-lived success. It can hardly be doubted that David's motive in promoting Amasa was a political one,—that he ventured upon so unjust a measure out of no regard for his late enemy, but in the hope of reconciling those who had lately followed him in the rebellion. It certainly can be regarded in no other light than as an act of gross injustice to Joab, who had just won the victory which restored David to his throne. But, though it bore bitter fruit later on, for the moment it succeeded in bringing back the men of Judah who had revolted. It seems, however, impossible that those who had been faithful to him through all his trial could have seen the promotion of Amasa without a feeling of disappointment and mistrust. Yet the immediate result did not justify that most certain truth that *what is morally wrong can never be politically right.* The real and permanent results of any action may be long in manifesting themselves, and may often seem at first to be far different from what they really are, which shows how unsafe it is to make the apparent success or failure of a deed the standard by which to judge of its morality.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Vers. 1–8. *The sinfulness of unmeasured grief.* I. *Wherein it consists and manifests itself.* 1. *As regards the Lord,* in ignoring the gracious gifts which He sends us along with and amid our sufferings, and in frustrating His gracious design to purify us by suffering from all selfishness. 2. *As regards our neighbour,* in slighting and violating the duties of love that we owe Him. 3. *As regards our own heart and conscience,* in reckoning the powers of spirit and will by exhausting emotion and enervating inactivity. II. *How*

it must be overcome. 1. Through the word of earnest admonition, which gives pain. 2. By energetically rising up to new life and faithful discharge of the duties of our calling. 3. By accepting the consolation and strength which come from above through the spirit of God.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Vers. 11–15. Could not David himself go back with the victorious army he had with him in Gilead? He could, no doubt; but—1. He would go back as a prince, with the consent and unanimous approbation of the people, and not as a conqueror forcing his way. He would restore their liberties and not take occasion to seize them or encroach upon them. 2. He would go back in peace and safety, and be sure that he should meet with no difficulty or opposition on his return, and therefore would be well satisfied that the people were well affected to him before he would stir. 3. He would go back in honour and like himself, and therefore would go back, not at the head of his forces, but in the arms of his subjects, for the prince that has wisdom and goodness enough to make himself his people's darling, without doubt makes a much better figure than the prince that has strength enough to make himself his people's terror. . . Our Lord Jesus will rule in those that invite Him to the throne in their hearts and not till He is invited. He first bows the heart and makes it willing in the day of His power, and then *rules in the midst of his enemies* (Psa. cx., 2, 3).—*Henry.*

One of the best proofs, it seems to me, that David's schooling was effectual, is this, that all his family griefs, his experience of his own evil, the desertion of his subjects, did not lead him to fancy that he should be following a course acceptable to God, if he retired to the deserts, or ceased to be a shepherd of Israel, instead of doing the work which was appointed for him. It shows how healthy and true his repentance and faith were that he again set himself to organise the people and to fight their battles, to feed them and rule them with all his power; when a religious prudence or self-interest might have whispered, "Do thy best to make amends by services to God for the ills thou hast done; save thyself whatever become of thy people Israel." These ungodly suggestions, the like of which came as angels of light to so many Christian monarchs in the middle ages, and sent them to do penance for their evils and to seek a crown of glory in monasteries, may have presented themselves to the man after God's own heart. If they did, he proved his title to the name by rejecting them. He showed that he could trust God to put him in the position that was best for him, that he knew God did not put him into the world to provide either for his body or his soul, but to glorify His name and to bless His creatures.—*Maurice.*

Ver. 14. So it will one day be with the Jewish nation, which is now serving an Absalom of their own will, but will then greet the return of their true king, and say, "Blessed be the kingdom of our father David that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Mark xi. 9, 10).—*Wordsworth.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16–40.

Shimei, Mephibosheth, and Barzillai.

David on his way back to his capital exhibits in his conduct and experience some of the penalties, the dangers, and the blessings of prosperity.

I. One of its penalties. The man who had most bitterly insulted David in his day of adversity was the first to render him homage on his restoration to power. Taking into account the change in David's circumstances, we can

scarcely be doing Shimei an injustice if we assume that he was much more real when he was cursing and stoning the fugitive king than when he was asking pardon at the feet of the victorious monarch. It is one of the blessings of adversity that men then reveal their real feelings towards us; we are not sought by the hypocrite, or the self-seeker, when there is nothing to be gained by serving us or professing to esteem us. And on the other hand, all who are prosperous to any great extent, must pay the penalty of sometimes being in doubt about the sincerity of some of those who court their favour and sound their praises. The more exalted the position, the more likelihood there is of attracting false friends and of finding it difficult to discern between the real and the seeming in those who surround us, and it is one of the trials which those in high places must always have to bear. It meets David on the very threshold of his return to prosperity.

II. **One of its dangers.** The treatment which David gives to Mephibosheth exhibits an indifference to the feelings of the son of Jonathan, and an amount of injustice which are very unworthy of him. Almost all students of the Bible agree in accepting Mephibosheth's explanation as the truth of the matter—the meekness with which he submits to David's decision reminds us of the unselfish spirit of his father, and makes us feel sure that he had been the victim of a false and designing man. How painful, then, must have been the reception which David gave him, granting him no opportunity of proving his innocence and fidelity, but dismissing him with the implication at least that he and his traitorous servant stood on a level in David's estimation. Various motives have been assigned to account for David's unworthy conduct in this matter. Some think he acted from motives of policy (see critical notes), and others that he was irritated by the consciousness that he had been deceived by Ziba, yet was unwilling to confess himself wrong. But in whatever light we regard his action we must find David guilty of an arbitrary exercise of rights which might belong to him legally, but which were no more morally his than if he had been in a private station. If Mephibosheth had had only the ordinary claim of a subject, David could have had no moral right to dispose of his case in this summary manner, and deprive him of half his estate without good reason. But it would have been difficult for David to find any man in the land to whom he owed so much as to the son of Jonathan, and his obligation was not lessened but increased by the error of judgment into which he had lately fallen. The fact that he had passed so unjust a sentence upon him on the former occasion made it his duty now to make every reparation in his power, instead of which he treats him with a haughty indifference, if not with disdain. This indifference to the feelings and claims of those whose destinies are in their hands is a sin to which men in power are especially prone; when their deeds are not liable to be called in question by their fellow men they are apt to act as though their will was the rule of the universe, and to forget that the higher the position the greater the responsibility. David at this time seems to have thus fallen into this common temptation.

III. **One of its greatest blessings.** There can be no more blessed gift of wealth or power than the ability which it affords a man to show gratitude to those who have befriended him in his time of need. It is always more blessed to give than to receive, but it is a special joy to a grateful heart to repay those whose kindness has cheered it in the dark days of sorrow, and to show them that we know how to value the most precious gift which one human creature can bestow upon another. David experienced this joy when he found himself in a position to say to Barzillai, "Whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do unto thee," and

we may be sure that he did not fail to fulfil his promise to the son, although unable to do so to the father. We can but desire that he who rewarded Barzillai's fidelity in the person of Chinham, had remembered to repay Jonathan's love by being generous to Mephibosheth. In this inconsistency of David—in this mingling of dutiful remembrance and ungrateful forgetfulness, we see how far removed are the best men from that symmetry of character which marked the Perfect Man, Christ Jesus.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 30. It is just a soul capable of such noble self-denial that feels most keenly the sting of any suspicion of its love or fidelity, and as no further reference is made to Mephibosheth in the sacred narrative, especially as David gives no charge concerning him to Solomon at his death eight years later, it is not unlikely that he did not long survive the grief and pain that Ziba's treachery caused him.—*Taylor.*

Mephibosheth thought, perhaps, of the word of the law, that God visits sins on children unto the third and fourth generation.—*Peter Martyr.*

Vers. 31–40. *The picture and example of a venerable and pious old age.* 1. *Blessed of God,* it devotes the temporal goods it has received to the service of compassionate brotherly love, far from all *avarice*; 2. *Honoured by men,* it desires not the vain honour of this world far from all *ambition*; 3. *Near the grave,* it longs only for home, far from all disposition to find *blessedness in this life*; 4. *But as long as God grants life,* even with failing powers it still serves the Lord and His kingdom, and in this service honours him by the devotion even of its dearest—far from all *self-seeking.*—*Lange's Commentary*

Barzillai's words remind us of the influence that age produces upon men. I. *A mellowness of heart.* There is a feeling soft and subdued running through the words of this patriarchal Gideonite. Old Time has, I think, generally this effect on the hearts of men. "Men, like peaches and pears," says Holmes, "grow sweet a little while before they begin to decay. I don't know what it is—whether a spontaneous change, mental or bodily, or whether it is through the experience of the thanklessness of critical honesty, but it is a fact that most writers, except sour and unsuccessful ones, get tired of finding fault at about the time they are beginning to grow old. At thirty we are all trying to cut our names in big letters upon the wall of this tenement of life; twenty years later we have carved them or shut up our jack-knives. Then we are ready to help others and care less to hinder any, because nobody's elbows are in our way. Do you know that in the gradual passage from maturity to helplessness the harshest characters have sometimes a period in which they are gentle and placid as young children? I have heard it said, but I cannot be sponsor for its truth, that the famous chieftain, Lochiel, was rocked in a cradle like a baby in his old age." Time produces upon men.—II. *An indisposition for exertion.* It seems benevolently arranged that, as the limbs get feeble and incapable of action, the inclination to exertion decreases too. The patriarch, therefore, gets reconciled to his position. The mind ceases to will what the body is incapable of performing. A craving for rest creeps over the frame as years advance. It is well that it should be so, in order that the soul may calmly ponder upon questions of its imperishable interests and that death may come with no sudden shock. If age brings on this indisposition to effort, let us work while we can—work while the mind is active and the limbs are blithe. Time produces upon men—III. *A lack of interest in the world.* At one time

an invitation to attend in state a king to his capital would have been a very strong temptation to this very great man, but now such an invitation has no attraction ; he declines the king's pressing offer. To an old man the world is a plum that has lost its bloom —an orange that has been sucked till the peel is dry. Time produces upon men—IV. *An incapacity for earthly enjoyments.* Years not only steal away our strength, but our relish for earthly pleasures. In this I see divine benevolence, for it means a loosening of the bonds that link us to this mortal state. Time produces upon men—V. *An interest in the dead.* "Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again that I may die in my own city and be buried in the grave with my father and my mother." Here is the filial instinct glowing in the breast of an old man. After the romantic wanderings of a long life, time brings the spirit back to the home of the childhood, and makes it yearn to sleep the long sleep of death by the side of "father and mother." Here is a rebuke to worldliness. What if you amass a princely fortune? Whilst it will not make you happy, either in the morning of your youth or the zenith of your noon, it will be utterly worthless to you if you live to old age.

Here is too, an argument for religion. Form an alliance with those eternal principles that will make your spirits young and strong amidst the infirmities of age.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

The subject of verses 41 to 43 belongs to the next chapter.

CHAPTER XX

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—"**There.**' "**In Gilgal, at the assembly of the tribes**; the word indicates directly the *place* ; indirectly the time of the following history." (*Erdmann*). "**A man of Belial.**" A worthless man. "He was," says Luther, "one of the great rogues of the high nobility, who had a large retinue among the people, and consideration or name, as Catiline in Rome." "**A Benjamite.**" "Probably one of the rabid Sauline party, if he were not, as is possible, of Saul's own family." (*Erdmann*) "**To his tents.**" "See on Chap. xix. 8."

Ver. 2. "**Went up.**" "From the plain of Gilgal to the hill country of Ephraim." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 3. "**Living in widowhood.**" *Lit. In widowhood of life.* Probably meaning so long as *their* lifetime, or it may mean during the lifetime of David. "They were not divorced, for they were guiltless ; but they were no longer publicly recognised as David's wives ; nor was their confinement to a sequestered life a very heavy doom in a region where women have never been accustomed to go much abroad." (*Jamieson*).

Ver. 4. "**Said to Amasa.**" Thus appointing him to the position which he has promised him in chap. xix. 13.

Ver. 5. "**He tarried.**" "Either because he met with distrust and opposition among the people, and could not so soon execute his commission ; or, because he did not wish to make haste, and nourished in his breast traitorous designs." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 6. "**Abishai.**" "Joab's was still David's official commander-in-chief, but David speaks to Abishai rather than to him, because he wished to have nothing to do with the latter on account of his crabbedness, and further knew that he would take Amasa's appointment ill." (*Erdmann*). "**Servants,** *soldiers.*" "The standing army in distinction from the levy of the people for which Amasa was sent." (*Erdmann*). "**Escape us.**" The verb means "to take away," and the phrase has been variously rendered, *escape, turn away,* and *tear out, our eye.* This latter rendering (adopted by Keil, Thenius and others) is taken to be equivalent to "severely injure us." But it seems more probable that one of the other readings is more correct, and that the expression means *to elude the sight—to escape.*

Ver. 7. "**Joab's men.**" Some have thought it strange that those who went out with Abishai should be so designated, and have, therefore, without sufficient reason, substituted Joab's name for that of his brother in verse 6. But from what follows, Joab appears to have marched with his brother to the field. "**Cherethites,**" etc. (see on chap. viii. 18). "**The mighty men.**" Gibborim. "The six hundred heroes mentioned in chap. xv. 18." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 8. "**The great stone,**" etc. Doubtless an isolated rock of considerable size. Gibeon lay north-west of Jerusalem, in the mountains of Ephraim, whither Sheba (verse 2), had gone." (*Erdmann*). "**Went before,**" rather *came towards.* "**Joab's garment.**" "The minute description of Joab's military dress and arms is intended to make it clear how he could suddenly kill Amasa without anyone's noticing his purpose." (*Erdmann*). "**His loins.**" "This statement receives ample illustration from the *Assyrian* sculptures on which warriors are depicted, their swords not upon the thigh, but on the loin or side." (*Jamieson.*) "**Fell out.**" Josephus explains that Joab purposely allowed it to drop out so that stooping to raise it at the moment when he saluted Amasa, he might hold it naked in his hand ready for action, without exciting suspicion.

Ver. 9. "**By the beard.**" A mode of salutation in the East. *Kissing* the beard is also a token of great respect and goodwill. "**My brother.**" "He was his first cousin." (*Biblical Commentary*).

Ver. 10. "**Fifth rib.**" "Rather *the abdomen.*" (*Keil*). "**Joab and Abishai.**" "The connection of the two favour the view that Joab had gone out at the head of the body of troops under Abishai." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 11. "**By him,**" *i.e.*, Amasa, no doubt by Joab's command. "**He that favoureth,**" etc. This was said to the men whom Amasa had gathered, and who came on ignorant at first of their leader's fall, and then of the cause of his death. This plan of Joab identifies his cause with that of David.

Ver. 14. "**Abel.**" *Lit.*, *meadow*, and the name of several places in Palestine, but from its proximity to Beth-Maachah (with which it is sometimes joined, verse 15, 1 Kings xv. 20, 2 Kings xv. 29), known to be the present Christian village of Abilel-Kamh (wheat meadow) in the extreme north of the country.

Ver. 15. "**They.**" "**Him.**" Evidently the first pronoun refers to Joab and his followers, and the second to Sheba. "**A bank.**" "The first preparation for a siege was the construction of a causeway, or embankment, for wheeling the battering rams and other military machines close to the walls," (*Jamieson*). "**It,**" *i.e.*, the embankment, "**in the trench,**" rather, *by the wall.*

Ver. 16. "**A wise woman.**" (See chap. xiv. 2). Some suppose her to have been, like Deborah, a judge or leader.

Ver. 18. "**They were wont,**" etc. These words are variously explained, but the most natural construction appears to be that Abel had formerly been famed for the wisdom of its inhabitants, and that it was unfair to besiege the city without consulting them. Erdmann observes that "negotiation before laying siege to a city (and a foreign city, indeed), such as the woman here refers to, is prescribed in the law. (Deut. xx. 10 *sq.q. comp.* Numb. xxi. 21.)

Ver. 19. "**A mother.**" A chief city. (See on chap. viii. 1). The villages surrounding such a city were called her *daughters.* (See the margin in Numb. xxi. 25, 32) etc.

Ver. 21. "**Hath lifted,**" etc. Some have supposed that the inhabitants of Abel now learned for the first time of the guilt of Sheba.

Ver. 22. "**The woman went,**" etc. To report the result of her parley, and to counsel the inhabitants to give up Sheba. "**And Joab returned,**" etc. "The issue of this occurrence, how David received the victorious Joab, is omitted in our present narrative; he was, doubtless, now also forbearing to a man who as a soldier was indispensable to him, and who, with all his punishment—deserving savagery, always meant well for his government." (*Ewald.*)

Ver. 23. "The enumeration of David's cabinet is here given to show that the government was re-established in its wonted course." (*Jamieson.*) "**Benaiah**" (see on chap. viii. 18).

Ver. 24. "**Adoram.**" Or *Adoniram.* "The nature of his office is indicated 1 Kings v. 27 sq compared with 1 Kings iv. 6." (*Erdmann.*) He continued in office until the time of Rehoboam (see 1 Kings xii. 18, and is called *Hadoram* in 2 Chron. x. 18).

Ver. 25. "**Ira.**" Not mentioned elsewhere. For his office see on chap. viii. 18, where David's sons are mentioned as holding such a position. The other names and offices enumerated are alike in both places.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Chapter xix.,

THE REBELLION OF SHEBA.

I. The fidelity of those who serve from self-interest cannot be depended on for a single day. All the acts of the men of Israel at this time seem to have been inspired by one consideration only, viz., What line of policy looks most likely to promote our interests? There was no question as to their duty, either to God or man. Hence they rallied to the standard of Absalom when he bid fair to overturn the throne of his father, returned to David when they found they had embarked in a losing cause, and revolted again from him the first moment all did not fall out in accordance with their wishes. So little are those to be depended on who have no higher rule of life, and so greatly are those to be pitied who put their trust in them. "*We have ten parts in David,*" said they, and, almost in the same breath, *We have no part in him.* To-day, *Hosanna*, to-morrow, *Crucify.—Henry.*

II. The unreasoning discontent of the multitude is the opportunity of the selfish and ambitious leader. There are always men quick to take advantage of the passion and ignorance of their fellow creatures, and to use them as stepping stones for their own aggrandisement. But for the foolish petulance of the men of Israel on this occasion, this son of Bichri would have never had even the pitiful notoriety which he thereby acquired; and there have been many like him in all ages who have only risen from obscurity by similar means. It would have been indeed for the peace of the world if all such reckless men had met with as speedy a downfall as did Sheba, but they have often lived long enough to involve many more in a common ruin. Before men give themselves up to the leadership of another they should consider well whither he is leading them and what guarantees he can give that his motives are pure. But they cannot do this if they themselves are under the dominion of pride and envy, as the men of Israel were at this time. Where any unruly passion is in the ascendant, the voices of reason and conscience are not listened to, and downfall of some kind must come.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Chap. XIX., vers. 41 to 43. In the conduct of the different tribes on this occasion, we may see a faithful picture of what is every day to be witnessed in the world around us. While some men, although convinced of the proper course to pursue, are still *talking* about their intentions—are consulting with their own interests—resolving, and hesitating, and again resolving—yet, after all doing nothing effectually; others like the tribe of Judah, when once persuaded of their duty, admit no farther argument on its expediency, but act with promptitude and decision. This forward zeal, however, gave great umbrage to the rest of Israel, for, like other worldly characters, it was not so much the good itself that they desired to see done, as to have themselves the credit of performing it.—*Lindsay.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8–13.

DAVID'S RETURN TO JERUSALEM AND THE MURDER OF AMASA.

I. The consequences of violating God's laws are not in this life confined to him who violate them. David had no sooner returned to his city and his

palace than he found himself confronted with a difficulty arising out of a double transgression. As we have before had occasion to remark (see on 1 Samuel i., 2, etc.), polygamy was a violation of God's intention with regard to marriage, which brought great sorrow upon David and upon others. The practice of concubinage seems a much farther remove from the Divine ideal, and a nearer approach to the customs of the heathen nations, and must in any case have often been felt to be a hardship by the woman. But David's great transgression entailed upon the women of his harem a heavier penalty than was common to such a position. It it true they were Eastern women, and therefore less alive to their humiliation by Absalom than women of this age and nation would be in similar circumstances, but they were *women*, and we have no reason to suppose they were entirely destitute of the instincts and desires proper to their sex. Upon them the consequences of David's transgression fell very heavily, and endured to the end of life. The certainty that in this sense, as in many others, no man liveth to himself, ought to be a strong motive to keep us from forbidden paths.

II. The consciousness of even pardoned guilt makes one in power weak and cowardly towards similar offenders. One of the most bitter elements in David's cup of affliction after his fall must have been to see his own evil deeds so faithfully imitated by those around him, and to feel unable to deal out the punishment they deserved. Amnon closely copied his adultery and Absalom his act of murder, without his being able to deal with either as he could have done if he had himself been innocent. And now when he probably hoped he had reaped the last of the harvest from that fatal sowing of sin, he sees his deed reproduced by Joab with startling similarity. The master had not scrupled to remove by violent means one who stood in his way, and it could not be expected that his less scrupulous servant would falter on the same line of action. Truly Joab had known the way before (chap. iii. 27), but he could be bolder now that David had gone the same road. David had been able to declare himself guiltless before the Lord from the blood of Abner, but he is silent concerning the death of Amasa, remembering without doubt how he had once commanded Joab to commit as cowardly a crime. It must have surely been this sense of blood-guiltiness which sealed his lips at this time, and almost compelled him henceforth to accept in silence whatever measures Joab thought fit to adopt, and to leave to his son the odious task of reckoning with him.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14-26.

The Death of Sheba.

I. A peace-maker is a blessing, both to the victors and the vanquished. A victorious commander may deservedly win great praise when he wins a great battle, because he may really be the means of bringing peace to a nation. Yet the blood of many may cry against him, because he can only gain his end by the loss of many, and the tears and maledictions of those whom he defeats mingle with the rejoicings of those whom he saves. And not only so, the blood of many of his own faithful followers must flow to win him reputation and success, so that, if he be a truly humane man, he will feel indeed that "there is nothing so terrible as a victory except a defeat," and will rejoice greatly if wrongs can be put right in any other way. Greatly are they to be held in honour, who, by wise words and deeds, avert so great a catastrophe as war, especially that most terrible form of it—civil war. It was Joab's good fortune to have such a mediator at the siege of Abel—one who had sufficient good

sense and influence enough with both parties to put an end to the strife without injury to the innocent on either side. For this good office this nameless woman deserves to be held in honourable remembrance now, as she doubtless was by her fellow-countrymen of her own day. To her must be awarded the blessing of the peace-makers—to be "called the children of God."

II. The life of one man is sometimes justly sacrificed to secure the life of many. Sheba had no reason to complain that the citizens of Abel bought their own safety with his head. Although it is cowardly and wrong at all times to act upon the doctrine of Cairaphas (John xi. 50) and save many at the expense of one, yet it is right to do this when the one man is the sole cause of the impending calamity, when the mass of the people have been misled and injured by him, and when there can be no safety for them while he lives. Such appears to have been the state of things in relation to Sheba and the inhabitants of Abel, and therefore they only acted in accordance with a recognised and just law when they delivered his head to Joab.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 20. Joab, in the prosecution of war, does not seem chargeable with peculiar "swiftness to shed blood," inasmuch as he could exclaim, as if indignant of the imputation, "Far be it from me that I should swallow up or destroy!" But when his private and personal interests were affected, he then gave full scope to his furious passions, without regard either to God or men. A man's *general* conduct may be good, and even exemplary, so that on the whole he may move in the world with reputation and usefulness, yet *one* indulged lust or passion may lead him on to crime and infamy.—*Lindsay.*

Spiritually the case is ours; every man's breast is as a city inclosed; every sin is as a traitor that lurks within those walls. God calls to us for Sheba's head, neither hath he any quarrel to our person, but for our sin. If we love the head of our traitor above the life of our soul, we shall justly perish in the vengeance. We cannot be more willing to part with our sin than our merciful God is to withdraw his judgments.—*Bp. Hall.*

CHAPTER XXI.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Then.**" Rather, *And*, consequently there is nothing to indicate the period when the events here recorded took place, and many commentators consider that the words, "in the days of David" are "expressly inserted to denote that they are not narrated in their chronological order." (*Biblical Commentary*). Keil says, "This occurrence certainly did not take place in the closing years of David's reign; on the other hand, it is evident from the remark in verse 7, to the effect that Mephibosheth was spared, that it happened after David had received tidings of Mephibosheth." "**Three years.**" "For the first two seasons the scarcity did not cause much anxiety, since David and the officers of his government probably regarded it as the natural consequence of neglecting the cultivation of the land during the troubles occasioned by Absalom and Sheba, and hoped that the internal resources of the country would be sufficient to supply the wants of the population." (*Jamieson*), "**His bloody house,**" rather "*the house of blood-guiltiness.*" This expression is in apposition to Saul, and determines the meaning more precisely." (*Keil*). "**He slew.**" Nothing is said elsewhere of this deed. The covenant made with these people is described in Josh. ix. 3, *sq. q.*

Ver. 4. "**No silver,**" etc. "Money payments as a compensation for blood-guilt were very common among many nations. Thus the law of Edward the Elder, in England, regulated the

wer-gyld to be paid by the slayer upon the principle, "If anyone be slain, let him be paid for according to his birth." (*Biblical Commentary*). "Neither for us," etc., rather, *not to us does it pertain to kill*, etc., *i.e.*, "it is not permitted us without more ado to execute blood-revenge for the murder of our people." (*Erdmann*). "What ye shall say," etc. "Assuming the necessity of blood-expiation." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 5. "The man that consumed," etc. "It appears then that Saul had broken the power of the tribe by his bath of blood." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 6. "Seven men," etc "A sacred number, denoting the performance of a work of God." (*Keil*). "According to Numb. xxxv. 31-33, homicide was to be expiated by death but the death of the murderer, not of his kindred; it is, however, intimated in verse 1, that Saul's kindred had shared in the murderous deed. (*Translator of Lange's Commentary*). "Haug thee up," etc., *i.e.*, *Crucify* them. "Whom the Lord did choose" or, *the chosen of the Lord*. Exception has been taken to this designation of Saul, and other renderings have been proposed. But the expression seems to indicate that "if Saul was the chosen of the Jehovah, his actions ought to have been more in accordance with his divine election (*Keil*), and that all the more must there be such expiation to the Lord for his sin as the Lord's anointed." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 7. "The king spared," etc. "The calamity brought upon Israel by Saul's breach of the oath to the Gibeonites would make David doubly careful in the matter of his own oath to Jonathan." (*Biblical Commentary*). "Rizpah." (See chap. iii. 7). "Michal." Nearly all commentators agree that this is an error of memory or a copyist's mistake, seeing that Merob, Saul's *eldest* daughter, was the wife of Adriel, and it seems almost certain that Michal had no children. (See on chap. vi. 23). Jamieson says that Kennicott has shown that two Hebrew M.SS. read Merab instead of Michal.

Ver. 9. "The hill," etc. In or near Gibeah, the home of Saul. (1 Sam. x. 5). "Before the Lord," *i.e.*, in a place devoted to the worship of Jehovah. "It is true that God had said that the children should not be put to death for the parents (Deut. xxiv. 16); but this law, while it controlled the action of the magistrate, did not restrain God, who required and accepted the expiation." (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 9. "The barley harvest." "In the valley of the Jordan this takes place in the last half of April. (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 10. "Until water dropped," etc. The early rain usually began in October. But rain may have been sent earlier as a token of forgiveness. The reason of the bodies being left unburied, contrary to Deut. xxi. 23, probably was that the death of these men being the expiation of a violated oath they were to remain until the fall of rain should give the assurance that God's anger was appeased and the national sin forgiven." (*Biblical Commentary.*)

Ver. 14. "And the bones," etc. Although not expressly stated, it is implied that the remains of the crucified men were interred at the same time and place, if not actually in the same tomb. "Zelah." The situation of this city is unknown.

Ver. 15. "Moreover," or, *and*. "Yet," rather, *again*. "This refers generally to earlier wars with the Philistines, and has probably been taken without alteration from the chronicles employed by our author, where the account which follows was attached to notices of other wars." (*Keil.*) "Probably this fragment belongs chronologically in the group chap. v. 18-25, in favour of which is the fact that David is here already king of all Israel, since he is called (verse 17) the *light of Israel*." (*Erdmann.*) But see also on verse 17.

Ver. 16. "Ishbi-benob." Many scholars understand this name to mean "the dweller on the rock." If this rendering be correct, he probably lived in some mountain fastness. "The giant," rather *Raphah*, a proper name for the ancestor of the giant race described in Deut. ii, 11, 20, etc. "Three hundred shekels." About eight pounds, half the weight of Goliath's (1 Sam. xvii. 7). "A new sword." The last word is not in the Hebrew and the better rendering is "*he was newly armed.*"

Ver. 17. "The light of Israel." "David had become the light of Israel from the fact that Jehovah was *his* light (chap. xxii. 29), or, according to the parallel passage in Psa. xviii 29, that Jehovah had lighted his lamp and enlightened his darkness, *i.e.*, had lifted him out of a state of humiliation and obscurity into one of honour and glory." (*Keil.*) This address of David's men seems to be against the assumption that the event here narrated occurred early in David's reign.

Ver. 18. "Gob." In 1 Chron. xx. 4, this is said to have taken place at Gezer. It is generally supposed Gob was a small place near Gezer. "Sibbechai." According to 1 Chron,

xxvii. 11, the leader of a division of David's army. "Hushathite." "In 1 Chron. xxvii. 11, Sibbecai is said to have belonged to the Zarhites, that is (probably) the descendants of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah. So far this is in accordance with a connection between this and Hushah, a name apparently of a place (1 Chron. iv. 4), in the genealogies of Judah. (*Smith's Biblical Dictionary*). It seems quite as probable that Hushah was the name of an ancestor. Josephus says that Sibbechai was a Hittite. "Saph," or *Sippai*. (1 Chron. xx. 5). *Miss Rogers*, in *Domestic Life in Palestine*, says, "I saw a number of Arabs belonging to the valley of Urtas, with their chief, a tall, powerful man, called Sheikh Saph, whose family, according to social tradition, has for ages been distinguished for the height and strength of its men."

Ver. 19. This verse in the original says that *Elnathan slew Goliath*, etc., but it is evidently a ecord of the same occurrence as that narrated in 1 Chron. xx. 5, which is most likely the correct reading, although, according to Gesenius, Goliath means simply a *stranger*, an *exile*, and might, therefore, have described all the members of a family or tribe.

Ver. 20. "Six fingers," etc. Such men have been met with elsewhere. Pliny (Hist. Nat. xi. 43), speaks of certain six-fingered Romans (*sedigiti*). This peculiarity is even hereditary in some families. (*Keil*). "Was born," etc., *i.e.*, was also a descendant of Raphah. Shimeah, or *Shammah*, Jesse's third son. (1 Sam. xvi. 9, chap. xiii. 3).

Ver. 22. A postscript, summing up the preceding verses. "By the hand of David." Evidently only in the sense that he commanded the heroes who slew these giants.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–9.

SAUL'S BREACH OF COVENANT WITH THE GIBEONITES PUNISHED IN HIS DESCENDANTS.

I.—**Natural laws work or rest as God's servants.** The Bible refers all the workings of the natural world to the will of God. It claims for Him the power to set in motion or to stay the operation of any one or of all the forces of nature as He sees fit. They are not the masters of our earth or of man, but servants obeying Him who is Lord of all. It is true that man will sometimes ignorantly or wilfully pervert and arrest the action of those laws which are to some extent within the reach of his influence, but this does not affect their divine origin. When, therefore, certain ordinary gifts of nature are withheld —when, as was most likely the case in the present instance, rain or sunshine do not visit the earth and quicken the seed into life and growth, those who believe in the God of the Bible refer the event, not to an impersonal law, but to a living Ruler of the universe. Indeed, apart from all scriptural teaching, it seems impossible for men who think to come to any other conclusion, for laws necessarily include a law-giver, and it is impossible to conceive of such a being as in any way fettered by his own methods of working. David was a true philosopher, as well as a devout believer, when he looked to the Lord as the only Being who could give rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, or command the clouds to withhold their blessings and so bring dearth and famine upon the land.

II. **The cause of the suspension of beneficent natural laws is to be found not in God but in man.** When David inquired of the Lord concerning the repeated dearth in the land, he evidently did so with the conviction that the cause of the dispensation was to be found not in the good nature of God but in the bad nature of man. He had formed such an estimate of the character of Jehovah as to be sure that He would not afflict his children willingly, or withdraw from them any of His gifts out of caprice, still less out of a desire to cause them pain or suffering. For no good human creature would be guilty of such conduct, and it would be blasphemy to ascribe to the ever-blessed God that which we should condemn in a fellow man. If a loving father withholds from his child his

accustomed provision for his needs, all unprejudiced minds at once conclude that the reason is to be found, not in the disposition of the parent, but in the character of the child. So God declared of old it was with Him and Israel, and so it must ever be with Him and all His creatures. All His withholdings of good gifts or infliction of positive ills are, either directly or indirectly, the outcome of man's sin, and are either for his correction or instruction, either to bring him back to the ways of God or to quicken and direct his steps after his return.

III. The punishment of sin is not remitted because it is delayed. The chief actor in this crime had long since left the earth, and had not in his own person received special retribution for this special act, but had been altogether rejected by God for an almost life-long disobedience to His commands. But there were most likely many still living who had been Saul's willing instruments on this occasion, and they now learnt that this unrighteous deed had not been forgotten by God, although He had so long kept silence concerning it. It is not more certain that the stone thrown into the air will return to the earth than that retribution will follow sin, and, although *individuals* may escape in this world, the crimes of families, and other communities rarely fail to be punished in the present life, although that punishment may be so long delayed as to pass over many of those who are guilty. This fact in God's government is closely linked with another, viz. :

IV. That one generation of men often suffer for crimes for which other generations are also responsible. It was so in the case of Saul and the Gibeonites. However guilty Saul's sons might be in this matter, they were not the only guilty persons, nor were they so guilty as their father, yet upon them only fell the penalty for this particular crime. Many generations of Egyptians oppressed the children of Israel, yet only those who lived in the days of the Exodus suffered for it. Many generations of Jews were guilty of killing the prophets, but Christ told those who lived in His day that the righteous blood of all was upon their heads. (Matthew xxiii. 35). In secular history we have many similar cases, and if we ask if such a law be just, we can only answer that the God of all the earth can have no motive for wronging any of His creatures, and that there is another world wherein all these apparent inequalities will find their level. Such a law of entail has a bright as well as a dark side, for the blessed influence of righteous deeds descends also, and one great end of such a law in the Divine government is evidently to deter men from iniquity by the consideration of the misery they may bring upon their posterity.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. There are things deeper and truer than any such philosophy, and among these I place the spiritual instincts of the human heart. Why is it, we are disposed to ask, that in almost all languages pestilence has been called by a name which—like our own word plague, which means a stroke—directly points to God's agency in its appearance? and whence comes it that, when a people are enduring such a calamity, there is a general thought of God among them, and their resolution becomes that of Jeremiah: 'Let us search, and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord?" Do not these things, and others like them, point to the fact that, by the mystic intuitions of the soul, God is recognised in all such visitations? and while we take into account the laws of external nature, shall we refuse to pay regard to the nature that is within us?—*Dr. Taylor.*

Let no one think it strange that the penalty should come thus, in famine, upon an entire nation, after a new generation had sprung up. For a

nation's history is a unit; and as there can be no such thing as retribution of a nation in the future state, it follows that if punishment for national sins is to be inflicted at all, it must fall in the subsequent earthly history of the nation that committed them. The generation which was alive in France at the eras of the massacre of St. Bartholomew and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was a different one from that which lived at the time of the first Revolution; yet in the events of the latter, with its Reign of Terror and rivers of blood, we have the undoubted consequences of the former. Many generations have come and gone in Spain since the days of Philip and the great Armada, yet we can not doubt that the miserable condition of that land for more than a century—a condition out of which its inhabitants find it hard even now to emerge—was due to the sins of those who knew not the day of their visitation, and suppressed the Protestantism which, but for the Inquisition, would have arisen among them, and enabled them to lead the van of European progress. The English occupants of India in 1857 were not the same as those who, under Clive and Hastings, and others, so unrighteously obtained possession of large portions of that empire; nay, they were in many instances men of another order and a nobler nature; yet upon these, ay, even upon the heads of sainted missionaries who repudiated and condemned the cruelty and craft of the first invaders, the terrible Nemesis of the mutiny did fall.—*Dr. Taylor.*

Fools look only who stands on the next stair or step, but Jacob, when he saw the angels ascending and descending, he inquired who stood on the top of the ladder and sent them to and fro. Ezekiel also inquireth who standeth on the top of the wheel. Whatever is the instrument of our sufferings, let God be looked upon as the chief agent. . . . The whole people suffered for Saul's sin, either because they approved it, or at least bewailed it not, neither did what they could to hinder it, whereby they became accessory.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 2. Leal to Israel, not to God, whose law, nevertheless, he might seem to have on his side (Deut. viii. 16, etc.). . . . And yet he might also be moved to this by covetousness to gain their lands and goods. . . . The hypocrite is fitly compared to the eagle, which soareth aloft, not for any love of heaven, for her eye is all the while upon the prey which by this means she spieth sooner, and seizeth upon better.—*Trapp.*

Vers. 1–9. Our feelings, influenced by the Gospel, recoil from this proceeding. The implacableness of the Gibeonites astonishes us; and also the compliance of the king appears to us to be in violent contrariety to his whole disposition, as well as to the state of mind in which he was at the time. But let it always be remembered that it was the economy of the law under which those things were done, and with the character of which they harmonised; and that the care of God, in his educating of the human race, aimed above all things at this—that He should be recognised and feared as the Holy One and the Just. To this divine purpose David must bend himself, and make full account of it, whatever inner conflict it may cost him. The great guilt of the house of Saul—perjury and murder at the same time—demanded *blood*, according to the inviolable law of God's kingdom. Already, indeed, that house, laden with sins, had been smitten by many judgments; but yet by none which discovered itself at the first glance to every one among the people, as a requital for that most culpable of all their crimes, the murder of the innocent Gibeonites. This special chastisement must not be omitted. For the prevention of doubtful interpretations in Israel, and for the heightening of esteem for every iota of the divine law, it *must* follow all that went before; and it truly did follow. The majesty and inexorable

rigour of the law, as it was in Israel divinely manifested, was scarcely ever more brightly, and in a more alarming manner, brought to view than it was on this occasion.—*Krummacher.*

Little did the Gibeonites think that God had so taken to heart their wrongs, that for their sakes all Israel should suffer. Even when we think not of it, is the righteous Judge avenging our unrighteous vexations. Our hard measures cannot be hid from Him; His returns are hid from us. It is sufficient for us, that God can be no more neglective than ignorant of our sufferings.—*Bp. Hall.*

We may learn from this history—

I. *What should in every case be the effect of temporal troubles, and afflictive dispensations.* They have not answered their first purpose, till they have brought us to God. Had David sooner "inquired of the Lord," he and his people had been sooner relieved from their distress; but while their hearts continued hard, and their consciences at ease, the evil not only continued, but continued to increase. Such, in general, is our conduct under the calamities of life. The mind is too deeply depressed—too fondly attached to present objects, to rise at once to Him who orders all things, both in heaven and earth. While we are passionately repining,—looking around for modes of relief, or for the sources of our suffering, we are too much occupied with *secondary* and *external* causes, to think of the sinful cause in ourselves, which may have drawn down upon us these troubles. . . . . Wherever God afflicts, there He speaks,—not indeed always in anger, more frequently in mercy. . . . . Yet in such admonitions He will not be disregarded; every successive stroke will be yet heavier and heavier, till it either draw us to Him or drive us from Him.

II. *The danger of trifling with oaths and solemn engagements.* . . . . God would teach us, by this instance of just severity, that *His* honour is implicated in every oath, and that he will exact an awful retribution for the violation of such solemn engagements. The very insignificance of the injured party, as here, may be a farther reason with Him for taking the cause upon Himself. . . . . In confirmation of this, we have another striking example in Scripture. In the days of Zedekiah a solemn treaty had been ratified with the King of Babylon, upon these humiliating conditions, "that the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that, by keeping of his covenant it might stand." Zedekiah, thinking to throw off this yoke, rebelled. . . . . Therefore, thus saith the Lord God: As I live, surely *mine* oath that he hath despised, and *my* covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head." (Ezek. xvii. 19).—*Lindsay.*

This whole narrative strikes us as extraordinary, at first almost staggers us. It places David in a strange light, it seems at first to place God in a strange light, but on a closer examination its mystery vanishes, and it is seen to harmonise both with the character of David and the righteous judgment of God. . . . What was Saul's motive in attacking the Gibeonites? There is reason to believe that when he saw his own popularity declining and David's advancing, he had recourse to base, unscrupulous methods for increasing his own (see 1 Sam. xxii. 7, 8). Evidently he had rewarded his servants, especially those of his own tribe, with fields and vineyards; but how had he got them? In no other way that we can suppose than by robbing the Gibeonites of theirs. . . . Probably he would give the larger share to the members of his family, but to prevent the transaction from having a mean personal aspect, he might so arrange that the people generally should have a share of the spoil. . . . If this was the way in which the transaction was gone about, it was fair that the nation should be visited with chastisement. . . . . No remonstrance had gone forth against the deed. . . . The authors of the outrage might now be dead, but their children were quietly living on the plunder. Even David himself

was not free from blame. When he came to the throne he should have seen justice done to this injured people. . . . . The famine was, therefore, a retribution deserved both by David and his people. It was a lesson on the consequences of riches gained by robbery. It was to show that perfidy and theft cost far more than they bring in. . . We now come to the main difficulty in this transaction. Where was the justice, it may be asked, of this frightful execution? Why should these unoffending men be punished so terribly for the long-forgotten sin of their father? It is not the rule of Scripture. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of his father, but every man shall bear his own iniquity." On the other hand, it may be said, is it not a rule of God's government? "I, the Lord, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, etc.?" There is no real contradiction between these seemingly conflicting rules. In the righteous judgments of God every man has to bear his own iniquity. Saul had to bear every atom of his. . . . There is no such thing as a son bearing the iniquity of his father in the sense of relieving the father of the load. . . But there is a law that often operates in the government of God. When a father is addicted to a sin . . . it often gets ingrained, as it were, into the very substance of the race, and . . . in cases where the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon future generations, it will commonly be found that the children have served themselves *heirs* to the sins of their fathers. . . . It was the blood that lay upon the *house*, as well as on Saul personally, that cried to heaven for vengeance. The sons that were given up to justice were probably living and fattening upon the fruits of that unprincipled massacre. . . . And if it should be said that, in going into this transaction, David appears to have felt little or no horror, we must remember how sparing the Scriptures are in their mention of men's feelings in such matters. He may have felt much that is not here expressed; or, if he did feel less concern about this deed of death than might have been expected, we must remember how familiar he had been all his life with the most ghastly scenes and how much familiarity tends to deaden the ordinary sensibilities of our nature.—*Blaikie.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10–14.

Rizpah and David.

I. Deep affliction often brings forth a nobility of character which would otherwise remain latent. It is not likely that Rizpah showed herself to be in any respect a remarkable woman before this great bereavement. She manifested probably no exceptional amount of affection for her children, and is hardly likely to have herself sounded the depths of her maternal love. But when plunged into this deep sorrow she revealed a self-sacrificing devotion, which lifted her at once far above the level of ordinary humanity. The death of her children awakened within her a noble heroism which would in all probability have lain dormant under less trying circumstances. This is not an uncommon occurrence. Men and women who seem very commonplace while no special demand is made upon their better nature, often rise into true heroes and heroines in the day of extraordinary trial, when the emotional side of their nature is called upon to assert itself.

II. Such nobility of character forms a common meeting ground for those otherwise widely sundered. There was little in common between David and Saul's concubine. The king had scarcely before this felt any interest, much less admiration, for Rizpah. But being himself a noble man and capable of

great self-devotion, this display of deep love and grief bridged over, for a time at least, the gulf that had hitherto divided them. Men are not unfrequently surprised into the discovery that some, from whom in all other respects they are as widely sundered as the poles, are one with them in deep and noble emotion which breaks down the wall of partition raised by opposing interests and differing circumstances. The father who mourned for Absalom as David did could not fail to be touched by such sorrow as Rizpah's, and for the moment we may well believe their common humanity made them forget all past differences.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

It must be borne in mind that the famine did not cease with the hanging of the sons of Saul. . . . . For three long months the bereaved daughter of Aiah held her watch. . . . . But still the Lord was not entreated for the land. . . . . But though private piety is all too weak to avert God's judgments on a guilty nation, it is of force to draw down from heaven a private blessing, and is never wholly unavailing. Deep, we may well believe, were the communings which Rizpah held with God in her awful loneliness, and fervent her supplications. . . . . And David, moved by her affecting piety, buried the bones of her sons with those of Saul and Jonathan . . . . and after that, God was entreated for the land. . . . . Both the infliction and removal of this scourge of famine afford a striking proof how deeply the well-being and happiness of nations may be affected by the personal character of their rulers, and consequently, what just reason we have to attend to the Apostle's exhortation. (1 Tim. ii. 2.)—*T. H. L., Dean of Exeter.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15–22.

David's Warriors.

I. Men's qualifications for service differ at different periods of life. When a man is young his body answers to his will as the well-built vessel answers to her helm, going hither and thither in obedience to every behest of the soul as the ship turns to obey every motion of the wheel. But as years pass on the body becomes a less ready instrument of the human will, and we are all made painfully conscious that our ability to perform falls far more below our desires and aims than in the days of youth. At whatever period in David's life the event took place which is recorded in verses 15 to 17, it is certain that it must point to a time when the strength of his outer man was no longer equal to that of his inner, when he lacked neither the courage nor the skill to face and fight a foe, but when he found that his powers of endurance were not so great as they had once been. To will was present with him still, but how to perform what he willed he found not. But if David had no longer the physical gifts which had distinguished his earlier days, he had other and far more needful qualifications for his present duties which he could not have possessed when he was a young man. There is this compensation given to all faithful men when they feel their bodily powers decline, that they now are far richer in all those gifts and graces which can only be gained by a long experience,—that their knowledge of God, of themselves, and of their fellow-men, having grown with their years, they can now serve their generation in a higher capacity than a physical one, inasmuch as wisdom to guide is more rare and precious than ability to act. David was more truly a light to Israel now than when he slew Goliath or captured the stronghold of Zion.

II. Men fall in with the purpose of God when they recognise the fact that a diversity of gifts tends to the common good. David and his warriors seem to have shown true wisdom concerning this matter. The king acknowledged that he was now not able to do as well on the field of battle as they were, and was content to confine himself to other duties, while they, freely rendering such services as they were able, declared that what they could do was as nothing in comparison with the worth of his services. Such a spirit tends to create that bond between men which was doubtless one great end which God had in view when He made them to differ so much in mental and physical endowments. By making it impossible for them to be independent of each other's services, the Father of the Universe would bring them into that fellowship without which they can not fulfil the destiny which He desires for them.

CHAPTER XXII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES. Ver. 1. This Psalm, with a few unimportant variations, is identical with the eighteenth in the Psalter. Wordsworth suggests that the modifications which there appear, where the title has "to the chief musician," may be accounted for from the circumstance that in the present chapter the song appears as used by David for his own private devotions; and in the Psalm xviii., it exhibits the form in which he delivered it for the general liturgical use of the Hebrew Church. The genuineness of the Psalm is acknowledged by all critics, except Olshausen and Hupfield, but there is a difference of opinion as to the time when it was composed. Keil thinks it belongs to David's later years. The "Biblical Commentary" refers it "to the early part of David's reign, when he was recently established upon the throne;" and Erdmann says "the time of composition (the reference in verse 51 to 2 Sam. vii. being unmistakeable) cannot be before the date when David, on the ground of the promise given him through Nathan, could be sure that his dominion, despite all opposition, was immovable, and that the throne of Israel would remain for ever with his house. The words of the title agree with the description of victories in verses 29-46, and point to a time when David had established his kingdom by war, and forced heathen princes to do homage (comp. verses 44-49). But as God's victorious help against external enemies is celebrated in the second part of the song, and the joyous tone of exultation shows that David's heart is taken up with the gloriousness of that help, it is a fair assumption that the song was written not after the toil of Absalom's conspiracy and the succeeding events, but immediately after the victorious wars narrated in chaps. viii. and x." "**Spake unto the Lord,**" etc. "These expressions are borrowed from Exod. xv. 1, and Deut. xxxi. 30. This is the more observable because the Psalm contains obvious allusions to the song of Moses in Deuteronomy." (*Alexander*). "**The hand of Saul.**" "Not because Saul was the last of his enemies, but rather because he was first, both in power and importance." (*Alexander*). "The poet's imagination, in its contemplation of the two principal periods of war, moves backwards, presenting first the external wars, which were the nearest and then the internal, with Saul and his house." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 2. "**My rock**" *Sela*, my *rock-cleft*, a place for refuge; not the same word as that used in verse 3. "First and frequently used by David, who had often found refuge on a *sela* in his persecution; indeed, it is only once used by any other writer (Isa. xxxii. 2) in the Old Testament, in a figurative sense, and there the metaphor is derived from the *shadow* and not from the *height* of the rock." (*Wordsworth.*) "**My deliverer.**" "The explanation of the foregoing figures. Whilst David took refuge in rocks, he placed his hope of safety not in their naccessible character, but in God the Lord." (*Keil*).

Ver. 3. "**God of my rock.**" Rather my *rock-God*. The word here rendered rock (*tsur*) indicates what is solid and immovable. "**Horn.**" "A term borrowed from animals which have their strength and defensive weapons in their horns." (*Kiel* and others). "Not only a protection against attack (as a shield), but also a weapon of attack." (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 4. "**I will call.**" "**Shall be saved.**" Not to be taken as future, but as "indefinite as to time, the English general present." (*Trans. of Lange's Commentary*). "**Worthy to be praised.**" Rather *the praised one.*

Ver. 6. "**Hell.**" *Sheol*, the under world, the place of departed spirits. "In the wide old English sense, a poetical equivalent to death." (*Alexander.*) **Prevented**, rather *encountered.*

Ver. 7. **Temple.** Better, *palace*, "for Jehovah is here represented as a King enthroned in heaven." (*Erdmann.*) The Hebrew word means both.

Ver. 8. "**The earth shook,**" etc. A few writers understand the following as a description of a real storm, and refer it to a battle with the Syrians when a storm occurred (2 Sam. vii. 5), but most agree with Kiel that it is a poetical description of David's deliverance which "had its type in the miraculous phenomenon which accompanied the descent of God upon Sinai, and which suggested, as in Judges v. 4, 5, the idea of a terrible storm that the saving hand of God from heaven was so obviously manifested, that the deliverance experienced by him could be poetically described as a miraculous interposition on the part of God."

Ver. 9. "**Smoke,**" etc. The figurative idea is that of snorting or violent breathing, which indicates the rising of wrath." (*Keil* and others.) Tholuck sees in the picture thus far an image "to be referred to the rising of the storm-cloud, and the flashes of sheet-lightning which announces the storm."

Ver. 10. "**Bowed the heavens.**" A picture of the low hanging storm-clouds, at whose approach the heaven seems to bend down to the earth." (*Erdmann.*) "**Came down.**" "The scene here seems to be transferred from heaven to earth, where the Psalmist sees not only the Divine operation, but the personal presence of Jehovah." (*Alexander*). **Darkness**, rather *gloom.* A poetical expression applied to thick clouds and vapours. (*Alexander.*)

Ver. 11. "**A cherub.**" "The cherubim of the Mosaic system were visible representations of the whole class of creatures superior to man. The singular form seems to be used here to convey the indefinite idea of a superhuman, yet created being. As earthly kings are carried by inferior animals, so the heavenly King is here described as being borne through the air in His descent by beings intermediate between Himself and man." (*Alexander.*) "The poetical figure is borrowed from the fact that God was enthroned between the two cherubim upon the lid of the ark of the covenant, and above their outspread wings. As the idea of His 'dwelling between the cherubim' (chap. vi. 2, etc.) was founded upon this typical manifestation of the gracious presence of God in the Most Holy place, so here David thus depicts the descent of Jehovah, picturing the cherub as a throne upon which God appears in the clouds of heaven, though without imagining Him as riding upon a sphinx or driving in a chariot-throne. Such notions are precluded by the addition of the term, 'did fly.'" (*Keil.*)

Ver. 12. "**Pavilions,**" *i.e., tents or coverts.* Alexander takes this as expressive of the brightness insupportable by mortal sight; Keil thinks that it represents Jehovah as hiding His face from man in wrath. "**Dark waters.**" Literally, *water gatherings*, or *watery darkness.* "A beautiful description of clouds charged with rain." (*Alexander.*) "**Thick clouds,**" or *cloud-thicket.* "This second noun is used only in the plural, and seems properly to designate the whole body of vapours constituting the visible heavens or sky." (*Alexander.*)

Ver. 13. "**Through,**" or *out of*, **were kindled,** rather *burned.*

Ver. 14. "**Thundered.**" "**Uttered His voice.**" The second clause is a poetical repetition of the first. (*Alexander.*)

Ver. 15. "**Arrows.**" "The lightnings of the last clause may be understood as explaining the arrows of the first." (*Alexander.*) "**Discomfited.**" "The standing expression for the destruction of the foe accomplished by the miraculous interposition of God." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 16. "**The** *breakers of death*" and the *streams of evil*, have, according to verse 5, overwhelmed David. Under the image of water-waves he has thus depicted the dangers that have threatened his life. The Lord in revealing His anger against his enemies, saves him by laying bare the depths of the sea to which he had sunk, and uncovering the foundations of the earth by the storm-wind of His wrath. Thither descending from on high the Lord seized him and drew him forth from the waves as described in the following verses." (*Delitzsch* and *Erdmann.*) Some writers also see here a reference to the early history of Moses. "The verb *to draw*," says Dr. Jamieson, "naturally suggests it." "*Luther*," says *Hengstenberg*, "already called attention to this reference. It is the more important as Moses was a type of the Israelitish people; the waters an image of the hostile oppression to which he was exposed; and the event, a prophecy constantly fulfilling itself under different circumstances."

Ver. 18. **Here is a transition from the figurative to the literal.**

Ver. 19. *Prevented.* (See on verse 6). "**Day of calamity.**" **Most writers think the time of Saul's persecution is here specially intended.**

Ver. 20. "**Large place.**" Lit. *the broad*, a condition of freedom and safety in contrast with the straits and dangers of the past.

Ver. 21. *The Lord rewarded*, or, requited. Alexander in Psalm xviii. translates the verbs of this clause into the future tense: "They have reference," he says, "to the condition of the Psalmist under his afflictions, and the hopes which he was even then enabled to cherish." "**Cleanness of hands.**" Dr. Jamieson sees here a special reference to David's refusal to injure Saul, or to free himself by any unrighteous act.

Ver. 22. "**Ways of the Lord.**" "The rules of human conduct given in His law." (*Erdmann.*) "**Wickedly departed,**" etc. Literally, "*wicked from God.*" "The combination of the verb and preposition shows clearly that the essential idea in the writer's mind was that of apostasy or total abjuration of God's service." (*Alexander.*)

Ver. 23. "**Judgments.**" *Rights.* (*Keil.*) *Judicial decisions.* (*Alexander.*) The verbs here are in the present tense.

Ver. 24. "**Mine iniquity.**" "That to which I am naturally prone, An undoubted confession of corruption." (*Alexander.*) "An indirect testimony to indwelling sinfulness." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 25. "**Therefore,**" etc. "This verse shows clearly that the futures in verse 21 must be strictly understood." (*Alexander.*)

Ver. 26. "**Merciful,**" or *gracious.*

Ver. 27. "**Pure,**" or *genuine.* (*Keil.*) "**Unsavoury.**" Better, *perverse*, or *crooked.* "The resemblance of the last clause of this verse to Lev. xxvi. 23, 24, makes it highly probable that the whole form of this singular dictum was suggested by that passage, the rather as this Psalm abounds in allusions to the Pentateuch and imitations of it." (*Alexander.*)

Ver. 28. "**Thou.**" This word is emphatic. "However men may despise thy afflicted people, I know that thou wilt save them." (*Alexander.*)

Ver. 29. "**Lamp.**" "While *light* is always the symbol of good fortune and well-being (Job xviii. 5), the burning lamp denotes the source of lasting happiness and joyful strength." (Job xviii. 6; Ps. cxxxii. 17; compare Isaiah xlii. 3; xliii. 17). (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 30. "**By thee.**" Literally, *in thee.* "By the first noun David means the *hostile bands* he has encountered; by the second, the *fortified places* he has conquered." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 31. "**Perfect,**" *i.e.*, *blameless*, free from all taint of injustice. "**Tried.**" As metals are by fire, and thus proved to be genuine. "**Buckler,**" *i.e.*, *shield.*

Ver. 32. "**A Rock.**" "He adopts the language of Moses in his song in Deut. xxxii. 4, 15, 18, 30, 31, in all of which places the word *tsur*, rock, is applied to God; and that is the first passage in the Bible, and the only chapter in the Pentateuch, where that figure is used, and it is next adopted in 1 Sam. ii. 2. In the present chapter the figure is used four times, in verses 3, 32, 47 twice, and in chap. xxiii. 3. These are the only places up to this point in the Hebrew Bible where the word *tsur* is thus used, and they serve to mark the connection between the hymns of Moses, of Hannah, and of David." (*Wordsworth.*)

Ver. 33. "**My strength.**" Better, fortress. "**Maketh my way,**" etc. Erdmann and Keil read, "*He leads the perfect, or innocent, on his way.*" Alexander explains it, "*Who gives my conduct the perfection which belongs to it.*"

Ver. 34. "**Hinds.**" The female gazelle, noted for her agility and swiftness. Probably alluding to David's speed in pursuit of his enemies. "A figurative element lies in what is here said of fleetness, which becomes quite obvious when we take it along with the last clause. David points to the quick and unrestrained course of his conquests just as in verse 29. (*Jamieson.*) "**High places.**" Either the strongholds taken from the enemy (*Hengstenberg*), or those of his own land which he held securely, and from which he ruled as king. (*Keil.*)

Ver. 35. "**Steel.**" Rather, brass or bronze. Both skill and strength are the gifts recorded in this verse.

Ver. 36. "**Gentleness.**" Keil and Erdmann read "*hearing*," *i.e.*, favourable acceptance of a request. Alexander translates "*condescension*," Hengstenberg "*lowliness.*"

Ver. 37. "**Enlarged my steps,**" *i.e.*, given me ample room to walk without hindrance. "**Feet.**' Rather, *ankles.* The whole verse expresses safe guidance.

Vers. 38, 39. A picture of a victory where the enemy is entirely vanquished.

Ver. 40. "**Thou hast girded.**" "As warriors bind up all their garments and fortify their loins, that they may be more fitted for strenuous effort." (*Jamieson.*) "**Subdued,**" etc. Literally, "*didst make to bow the knee.*"

Ver. 41. "**The neck,**" or "**the back.**" Made them turn to flee. (See Ex. xxiii. 27.)

Ver. 43. "**As the dust.**" "This language may be only expressive of that contempt in which ancient conquerors were wont to indulge when speaking of their foes. But it is literally true that they might soon be reduced as small as dust. The bodies of slain enemies that lie exposed without the rites of burial on the field or streets, soon become the prey of dogs or vultures, and the bones, stripped of all flesh, blanch in the warm climate, where they are not long in being crumbled to dust, and so trodden under the feet of their masters." (*Jamieson.*)

Ver. 44. "**Strivings,**" or *contests.* This may especially refer to the internal conflicts in David's own kingdom. (So *Keil* and *Alexander.*) "The closing words of this psalm, and its obvious connection with the promises in 2 Sam. vii., show that the anticipation of the last clause of the psalm was not limited to David's personal triumphs, either at home or abroad, but meant to comprehend the victories of his successors, and especially of Him in whom the royal line was at once to end and be perpetuated." (*Alexander.*)

Ver. 45. "**The stranger.**" Or, "*the sons of outland,*" *i.e.*, foreigners. "**Submit.**" Literally, *lie, i.e.*, yield a feigned obedience. "**As soon as they hear.**" This may mean, "they will submit at the mere report, or when they hear the command they will obey," implying personal presence.

Ver. 47. "**The Lord liveth.**" In contrast to imaginary gods or dead idols. Some modern expositors understand this to be equivalent to the acclamation uttered at the coronation of an earthly monarch, but Keil, Alexander, Erdmann, and others, point out that this would be inappropriate to any but a mortal being. They take it simply as a declaration which "itself is to be taken as praise of God" (*Keil*), for "praising God is simply ascribing to Him the glorious perfections which belong to Him; we have only to give Him what is His own." (*Hengstenberg.*) "**Blessed,**" *i.e., praised,* or *worthy to be praised.* "**Rock.**" (See on verses 3 and 32.)

Ver. 49. "**The violent man.**" Most writers take this to refer in the first instance to Saul, but to him as typical of a class.

Ver. 50. "**Among the heathen.**" Or, *the nations.* "This indicates that David's experienced mercies were so great, that the praise of them should not be confined within the narrow bounds of Palestine. He can only have a proper auditory in the nations of the whole earth." (*Hengstenberg.*) "Paul was therefore perfectly justified in quoting the verse in Rom. xvi. 9, along with Deut. xxxii. 43 and Ps. cxvii. 1, as a proof that the salvation of God was intended for Gentiles also." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 51. "**His king . . . His anointed.**" "The king whose salvation the Lord had magnified was not David as an individual, but David and his seed for ever—that is to say, the royal family of David which culminated in Christ. David could thus sing praises on the ground of the promise which he had received (chap. vii. 12-16), and which is repeated almost verbatim in the last clause of this verse." (*Keil.*)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–19.

David's Song of Thanksgiving.—Part I.

I. Deep gratitude in the heart will find its way to the lip. It seems altogether unnatural that any being should experience real and deep emotion without in some way making it manifest to others—we should as soon expect to see the cup filled above the brim without running over as to find a man with a heart overflowing with grateful love who gave no expression to his feeling. The one seems as great a contradiction of the laws of our soul-life as the other does of the physical world outside of us. True it is that speech is not the only index of what men feel, and there are often many words where there is little or no emotion, still there appears to be a divinely ordained connection between all deep stirring of the inner life—especially when it is of a joyous nature—and

the utterance of it in speech, so that the experience of each man may be helpful to all, and individual joy be increased by the sympathy of others. It is so in the heavenly world, for there we are told the redeemed Church gives expression to its grateful love in songs of praise, and it was so with David. Even while surrounded with much to sadden him, he could not look back upon a life so filled with tokens of Divine favour without bursting forth into a song of thanksgiving, which, although addressed in the first instance to Jehovah, was doubtless intended also to be a testimony to his fellow-men.

II. The foundation of all joy in God is found in a conviction of His personal interest in the individual man. The key-note of this psalm, and, indeed, of the whole psalter, is a sense of personal relationship to an Almighty and Loving Father; not simply a share in a general providence which extends to all, or even to a few, but of special interposition and guidance on behalf of one man as truly if he were the sole object of God's care. There are many ascriptions of praise in the Bible to God as the God of nations and of all created beings, but there are many in which the writers confine themselves principally, and often entirely, to celebrating His goodness to them as individual men and women, and this not because they were selfish, entirely or chiefly occupied with their own concerns and thinking little of the needs of others. In this song David makes no mention of anybody but himself, and yet we know he had the welfare of his people very near his heart, and grieved deeply when his sin brought trouble upon them (see chap. xxiv. 17). Nehemiah gave up his place in the king's palace to devote himself to his people, yet he could not feel heart-satisfaction merely in the help God gave to him as one of a nation, but craved a special and individual remembrance also (see Neh. v. 19, xiv. 14, 22, 31). Nor is this feeling confined to Old Testament saints. Paul was, perhaps, the most self-forgetful man who has ever lived, yet, amidst all his praises for the riches of Christ's mercy to the world, his gratitude is never deeper than when he speaks of the Saviour who "loved *him* and gave himself for *him*" (Gal. ii. 20); and he never penned a more glowing ascription of praise to God than when he contemplated the abundant grace which had been manifested to himself personally (1 Tim. i. 12-17). The Bible does not require men to ignore their individuality, on the contrary Christ himself appeals to that Divinely-implanted self-love, which is so far removed from selfishness (Mark viii. 36), that those who obey its instincts are never at rest unless they can persuade others to partake of the same blessedness. An unshaken confidence that God is his God in a personal and direct sense, is the only foundation for that rest and satisfaction of the spirit without which no obedience to God or service to man can ever be rendered.

III. No material similitude is too strong to express soul-experience. The ocean-depths are great, but they are not too great to set forth the deep agony into which a soul is sometimes plunged by remorse or by a sense of God's displeasure. The waves of the sea are often rough, and buffet the weary swimmer until his bodily strength entirely fails him; but they are not rougher than the waves of adverse circumstances which often overwhelm his soul. God's hand was seen very plainly when He drew Moses out of the water and made a way for Israel through the sea, but when David looked back on his eventful life he felt that Divine interposition was as plainly seen in the deliverances which he had experienced. Storm and fire and earthquake are wonderful manifestations of the power of God, but they are not so mighty nor so glorious as the omnipotence which rules in the world of spirit, and works all things there also according to the counsel of His own will. It is great to still the noise of the waves, but it is greater to keep in check the passions of evil men (Ps. lxv. 7),

and more glorious to rule over the the countless myriads that people the globe than to ride upon the wings of the wind. Therefore no metaphor that David here uses can even adequately set forth what he desires to express, because nothing that belongs to the world of sense can perfectly represent the unseen and the spiritual.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. God lets out His mercies to us for this rent of our praises, and is content we have the benefit of them, so He have the glory.—*Trapp.*

The mention of Saul in the title does not indicate that the Psalm was composed in David's early life, but rather that, even though thirty years had gone since his persecution by the son of Kish, the deliverances which he then experienced had not faded from his memory, but still stood out before him as the greatest mercies which he had ever received. We are prone to forget past favors. The benefactors of our youth are not always remembered in our after years; and in the crowd and conflict of events in our later history we have too often little thought to spare, and few thanks to express, for our early mercies. We do not enough consider that, in mounting the ladder of life, it is often more difficult to set our foot on the first round than to take any single step thereafter; and, therefore, that those who aided us in the beginning have given us by far the most effectual assistance. But it was not so with David, for as he sits here looking back on his career, his first conflicts seem still his greatest; and much as he blessed God for after-kindness, he places high above all the other favors which he had received his deliverance out of the hand of Saul.—*Dr. Taylor.*

Ver. 2. In the chapter that immediately follows the names of David's great captains are faithfully recorded and their exploits duly chronicled, but in his address to God there does not occur the name of a single human being. . . . . In the intensity of the gaze which is fixed on him who is invisible, the eye of faith lost sight for a time of the human instruments through whom much of the work was done. He who in the depths of his penitence saw but One *injured* Being, and said "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned;" now at the height of his prosperity sees but one *gracious* Being.—*Blaikie.*

Vers. 2, 3. It pleased holy David more that God was his strength than that God gave him strength; that God was his deliverer than that he was delivered; that God was his fortress, buckler, horn, his high tower, than that he gave him the effect of all these. It pleases all the saints more that God is their salvation, whether temporal or eternal, than that he saves them; the saints look more at God than at all that is God's.—*Caryl.*

This is no vain repetition, neither is it a straining after effect, like that of the young orator who piles epithet upon epithet, weakening only where he meant to strengthen; but it is an attempt to describe, from many sides, that which he felt could not be fully shown from any single standpoint. He means to say, that for every sort of peril in which he had been placed, God had been a protection appropriate thereto; as if he had said, "those whom God intends to succour and defend are not only safe against one kind of danger, but are, as it were, surrounded by impregnable ramparts on all sides; so that, should a thousand deaths be presented to their view, they ought not to be afraid even at this formidable array." Nor is this many-sided description of God's protection without its value to us; for though we may have proved his power to help us in one way, we are apt

to fall into despair when some new danger threatens us, and therefore it is reassuring to have David's testimony to the fact that those whom God shields are incased all round, and will have perfect protection in every emergency.—*Dr. W. M. Taylor.*

Ver. 4. When David called on God in danger, he very specially set Him before his mind as "worthy to be praised." A very remarkable habit this, and the key to many of his spiritual triumphs. He first sets before his mind the gracious, encouraging, reassuring aspects of God's character, then asks deliverance from his enemies. —*Blaikie.*

This doctrine is in tribulation the most ennobling and truly golden. One cannot believe what assistance such praise to God is in pressing danger. For as soon as you begin to praise God, the sense of the evil will also begin to abate, the comfort of your heart will grow, and God will be called upon with confidence.—*Luther.*

Vers. 4–7. *The cordial intercourse of prayer* between the Old Testament saints and their covenant-God is the *factual proof of the positive self-revelation of the personal, living God,* without whose initiative such over-springing of the chasm between the holy God and sinful man were impossible, and also the *most striking refutation* of the false view that the religion of the old covenant presents an absolute chasm between God and man. *The real life communion* between the heart that goes immediately to its God in prayer and the God who hears such prayer, is, on the one hand, in contrast to the extra testamental religion of the pre-Christian world, alone founded on God's positive historical self-revelation to his people and the thereby established covenant relation between them, and, on the other hand, as sporadic anticipation of the life-communion with God established by the New Testament Mediator, it is a *factual prophecy* of the religious ethical life-communion (culminating in prayer) between man redeemed by Christ and His heavenly Father.—*Erdmann.*

Ver. 7. Prayer is that postern-gate which is left open even when the city is straitly beseiged by the enemy; it is that way upward from the pit of despair to which the spiritual miner flies at once when the floods from beneath break forth upon him. Observe that he *calls,* then he *cries*—prayer grows in vehemence as it proceeds. Note also that he first invokes his God under the name of Jehovah, and then advances to a more familiar name —"*My God.*" Thus, faith increases by exercise, and He who we first viewed as Lord may soon be our God in covenant. . . . Above the noise of the raging billows of death or the barking dogs of hell, the feeblest cry of a true believer will be heard in heaven. Far up within the bejewelled walls and through the gates of pearl the cry of the suffering suppliant was heard. Music of angels and harmony of seraphs availed not to drown or even impair the voice of that humble call. The King heard it in His palace of light unsufferable, and lent a willing ear to the cry of his beloved child.—*Spurgeon.*

If you listen even to David's harp you shall hear as many hearse-like airs as carols, and the pencil of the Holy Ghost hath laboured more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Solomon. Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes, and adversity is not without comforts and hopes. We see in needlework and embroideries it is more pleasing to have a lively work upon a sad and solemn ground than to have a dark and melancholy work upon a light-some ground. Judge, therefore, of the pleasures of the heart by the pleasures of the eye. Certainly, virtue is like precious odours—most fragrant when they are crushed; for prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue.—*Lord Bacon.*

Ver. 12. Blessed is the darkness which encurtains my God. If I may

not see Him, it is sweet to know that He is working in secret for my eternal good. Even fools can believe that God is abroad in the sunshine and in the calm, but faith is wise and discerns them in the terrible darkness and threatening storm.—*Spurgeon.*

Vers. 1, 19. The means by which this deliverance was achieved were, as far as we know, those which we see in the books of Samuel—the turns and chances of Providence, his own extraordinary activity, the faithfulness of his followers, the unexpected increase of his friends. But the act of deliverance itself is described in language which belongs to the descent upon Mount Sinai and the passage of the Red Sea. It was the exodus, though of a single human soul, yet of a soul which reflected the whole nation. It was the giving of a second law, though through the living tablets of a heart deeper and vaster than the whole legislation of Moses. It was the beginning of a new dispensation.—*Dean Stanley.*

At the basis of the symbolism of nature lies the idea that certain peculiarities in the nature and action of God correspond with it. Thence God Himself is at times described as *present* and *active* in these phenomena of nature, not merely accompanied by them, and in bold but contemplative expressions the stirring up and expression of his wrath is represented as the kindling of His light—nature in all the turns of fiery and flaming figures. . . . These *natural phenomena*, not so much in themselves as under certain circumstances and *more particular forms*, form partly the *symbol*, partly the *means* of a Theophany.—*Dr. Moll.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20-25.

David's Song.—Part II.

I. Men are to be judged by the spirit of their lives, and not by isolated actions. It is evident that we must read David's words here concerning himself in the light of others found elsewhere, and then we shall understand that he does not claim to have been faultless even in his outward life, or to have merited the distinguishing marks of divine favour that he had received. (See Suggestive Comments.) He can only be recording his consciousness of a generally faithful discharge of his public duties and of a life which had, upon the whole, been governed by pure and holy motives. If a man holds a fort against an enemy for many years, and is upon one occasion overpowered and taken prisoner, even if it be by his own negligence, he cannot be classed with him who treacherously parleys with the foe and betrays his trust for selfish ends. He must be regarded as blameworthy, but if he make every possible effort to retrieve his failure he cannot be treated as a deserter. David's reputation was sadly tarnished by his being surprised through being found morally asleep by the tempter when he ought to have been awake and standing upon his watch-tower. But though he was at that time captured by the devil at his will, and remained for some time tied and bound in the camp of the enemy, the 51st Psalm reveals his efforts to escape, and his desire, so far as it was possible, to regain his old position and again serve God in serving his people. God's subsequent treatment of David reveals that He did not judge him by this fall, or even by repeated false steps, but by the general spirit and intent of his whole life, and the heart and conscience of every upright man testify to the justice of the divine verdict. It has been remarked that the disobedience of Saul in the matter of the sacrifice (1 Sam. xiii.) bears no comparison in itself to the crimes of David in relation to Uriah, yet it seems to have been visited by a far heavier penalty. We can only explain the

different treatment of the two offenders upon the principle just considered. (See also on this subject, page 360.)

II. **The character of man influences the conduct of God.** David here teaches this truth by connecting his own faithfulness and integrity with the gracious dealings of God towards him, making, in fact, the one dependent on the other. Valuable possessions of any kind give a man worth and importance in the eyes of others Even material wealth increases a man's worth in the estimation of his fellow men—because such an addition to his existence enables him to do what poorer men cannot do, he is treated with more consideration, and his life is regarded as more precious. The gifts and possessions of the intellect more justly give value to him to whom they belong—great knowledge and mental ability can be so beneficial to the community at large that he who has them is held in high estimation, and men who can appreciate such a person delight to honour him. But much more does moral excellence make a man precious in the sight of other good men. They look upon character as the real and personal and eternal possession, and value human creatures only in proportion as they are holy and true. This they do, not only because of the sympathy which must exist between all who are united in desire and aim, but because of the beneficial influence of such a character—because of the blessed use of such a life in the world and in the universe. It would be strange indeed if we found this rule reversed as we ascended in the moral scale—if the infinitely good God did not set a high price upon human character, and deal with men accordingly. True is it that he can discern flaws and imperfections in the best of human creatures, but His moral perfection does not prevent Him from looking with approval upon those who love and seek after righteousness, however morally weak they may be. He not only loves them for all that is God-like within them, but for the efforts they make to uphold and advance His kingdom in the world. Such being the regard in which they are held by God, it must be that His dealings with them are in accordance with His gracious approval of them, and there must, therefore, be a special and intimate connection between human character and Divine conduct.

III. **Upon the character and conduct of men depends their view of the character and conduct of God.** Many commentators do not think this idea is expressed in verses 26 and 27, but that they only express the truth just dwelt upon, viz., "that God's objective, real conduct towards men, according to His retributive justice, corresponds exactly to man's ethical conduct towards God" (*Erdmann*). But David may also here refer to the undoubted fact that every man's conception of God depends upon his own condition of heart and conscience. Men see each other through the same medium. The face that looks into the mirror is the same that is seen reflected; there are laws which forbid that distorted or unlovely features should give back a beautiful and pleasing reflection. And there are also laws which make all other men appear morally unattractive and even disagreeable to a wicked or even an unloving man. He who lives for self thinks everybody whom he meets is a selfish being, and the proud and angry man is always complaining of the pride and bad temper of those around him. There is some objective foundation for these conceptions, inasmuch as evil passions in ourselves call forth and foster the same in others and the reverse; and there is a sense in which even the unchanging and righteous God, as we have already seen, must really manifest a side of His perfect character to the unholy and rebellious which differs from that which is seen by those who love Him and desire to serve Him. But apart from the actual fact, all the ways of the Almighty seem hard and often unjust to those who will not fall in with His methods of blessing them, and the more they rebel under the yoke the heavier

it must really become. The old statute is still in force:—"*If ye will not be reformed by me in these things, but will walk contrary unto me, then will I walk contrary unto you*" (Lev. xxvi. 23, 24), but every man who is unreconciled to God regards even His most merciful dispensations and laws from a false standpoint, and often transfers his own unrighteousness to the spotless character of his Maker.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 21. Albeit the dispensations of Divine grace are to the fullest degree sovereign and irrespective of human merit, yet in the dealings of Providence there is often discernible a rule of justice by which the injured are avenged and the righteous ultimately triumph. David's early troubles arose from the wicked malice of envious Saul, who, no doubt, prosecuted his persecutions under cover of charges brought against the character of the man after God's own heart. These charges David declares to have been utterly false, and asserts that he possessed a grace-given righteousness which the Lord had graciously rewarded in defiance of all his calumniators. Before God, the man after God's own heart was a humble sinner; but before his slanderers he could, with unblushing face, speak of the cleanness of his hands and the righteousness of his life. He knows little of the sanctifying power of Divine grace who is not, at the bar of human equity, able to plead innocence. There is no self-righteousness in an honest man knowing that he is honest, nor even in his believing that God rewarded him in Providence because of his honesty, for such is often a most evident matter of fact. It is not at all an opposition to the doctrine of salvation by grace, and no sort of evidence of a Pharisaic spirit, when a gracious man, having been slandered, stoutly maintains his own integrity and vigorously defends his character. A godly man has a clear conscience, and knows himself to be upright. Is he to deny his own consciousness, and to despise the work of the Holy Ghost, by hypocritically making himself out to be worse than he is? A godly man prizes his integrity very highly, or else he would not be a godly man at all; is he to be called proud because he would not readily lose the jewel of a reputable character? A godly man can see that in the long run uprightness and truth are sure to bring their own reward; may he not, when he sees that reward bestowed in his own case, praise the Lord for it? Yea, rather must he not show forth the faithfulness and goodness of his God? Read the cluster of expressions in this and the following verses as the song of a good conscience, after having safely outridden a storm of obloquy, persecution, and abuse, and there will be no fear of our upbraiding the writer as one who set too high a price upon his own moral character.—*Spurgeon.*

Ver. 22. That is, with a purpose and resolution to continue in the way of sinning, and that is the property of sincerity. A man indeed may be overtaken and surprised in a temptation, but it is not with a resolution to forsake God and to cleave unto the sin, or rest in it. He will not sleep in it, spare it, or favour it; that is, to do wickedly against God, to have a double heart and a double eye; to look upon two objects, partly at God and partly at sin; so to keep God as to keep some sin also, as it is with all false-hearted men in the world. They look not upon God alone, let them pretend to religion never so much, but upon something else together with God; as Herod regarded John, but regarded his Herodias more; and the young man in the gospel, comes to Christ, yet he looks after his estate; and Judas followed Christ, yet looks after the bag; this is to *depart wickedly from God.*—*W. Strong.*

Ver. 24. Keep himself! Who made man his own keeper? 'Tis the Lord that is his keeper; He is the keeper of Israel and the preserver of men. If a man cannot keep himself from sorrow, how can he keep himself from sin? God indeed in our first conversion works upon us as He works upon the earth, or Adam's body in paradise, before He breathed a soul into it, or made a living creature; such a power as Christ put forth on Lazarus in his grave, for we are dead in trespasses and sins; but yet, being living, he must walk and act of himself, the Lord will have us to co-operate together with Him, for we are built upon Christ, not as dead, but as "living stones." (1 Pet. ii. 5).—*W. Strong.*

There is "*I have*" and "*I have not*," both of which must be blended in a truly sanctified life; constraining and restraining grace must each take its share.—*Spurgeon.*

Mark "from *mine* iniquity." The godless man, though he do much, will be sure to fail here, and the godly man will strike home here wherever he be favourable. A horse that is not sound, but foundered, will favour one foot, if not more; the lapwing, some observe will cry and make a great noise, but it is when she is farthest from her nest; the hypocrite may keep a great stir about many sins, but there is one sin which he meddleth not with. There is, says a learned divine, no greater argument of unsound repentance than indulgent thoughts and reserved delight and complacency in a master-sin. As some grounds are most proper soils to breed and nourish some particular weeds, so are some men's hearts for some particular sins, and the devil holds them as fast by this sin as by ten thousand. . . . The creature may do much by the command of God, but there is old stir and pulling before this sin be separated from him. If this be once done thoroughly the man is converted truly.—*Swinnock.*

Ver. 25. God first gives us holiness and then rewards us for it. We are His workmanship—vessels made unto honour, and when made the honour is not withheld from the vessel; though, in fact, it all belongs to the Potter upon whose wheel it was fashioned. The prize is awarded to the flower at the show, but the gardener reared it; the child wins the prize from the schoolmaster, but the real honour of his schooling lies with the master, although, instead of receiving, he gives the reward.—*Spurgeon.*

Ver. 26. Note that even the merciful need mercy. No amount of generosity to the poor or forgiveness to enemies can set us beyond the need of mercy.—*Spurgeon.*

Vers. 22–25. What David here extols is not the ground upon which he personally, as a sinner, obtained the favour of God, but the ground on which he, as the public champion of a great cause, enjoyed God's countenance, while he was honestly and faithfully maintaining that cause. There could be no self-praise in the lieutenant of a ship saying to his captain, "I adhered to your instructions in every point, and my success was complete." There would have been no self-righteousness in such a man as Luther saying, "I constantly maintained the principles of the Bible—God crowned my labours with success;" for the honour in such cases is not claimed by the person acting, it is given to his superior, by whose instructions he has acted . . . . No other spirit than this can with consistency be claimed for David.—*Blaikie.*

The current of his moral being flowed on in the channel of everlasting right. His sins were only wavelets on the stream, which the winds of temptation occasionally dashed over the embankments.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

As you may see a proportion between sins and punishments which are the rewards of them, so that you can say, such a sin brought forth this affliction, it is so like its father; so you might see the like proportions between your prayers and your walking with God and God's answers to you and His

dealings with you. So did David. *According to the cleanness*, etc. His speech denotes some similitude or likeness, as, for example, the more by ends or carnal desires you had in praying, and the more you mingled of these with your holy desires, and the more want of zeal, fervency, etc., were found in your prayers, the more you shall, it may be, find of bitterness mingled with the mercy, when it is granted, and so much imperfection, and want of comfort in it. So says David in this psalm, "*With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure.*" Pure prayers have pure blessing, and *à contra*, "*With the froward thou wilt show Thyself froward.*" And, again, as you in prayer sometimes slackened and grew cold, so you might see the business in like manner to cool and cast backward, as, when Moses' hands were down Amalek prevailed, and when they were lifted up Israel had the better. A man finds in praying that his suit sometimes sticks, and goes not on as he expected; but, on the contrary, when he was stirred up to pray, then still he found things to go well. By this a man may clearly see that it was the prayer which God did hear and regarded. Thus, likewise, when a man sees hills and dales in a business, fair hopes often, and then all dashed again, and the thing in the end brought to pass, let him look back upon his prayers. Didst thou not in like manner just thus deal with God? When thou hadst prayed earnestly, and thought thou hadst even carried it, then dash all again by interposing some sin, and thus again and again. Herein God would have you observe a proportion, and it may help you to discern how and when they are obtained by prayer, because God deals thus with you therein in such a proportion to your prayers.—*T. Goodwin.*

Vers. 26, 27. If men will deal plainly with God, He will deal plainly with them. He that is upright in performing his duty shall find God upright in performing His promises. It is God's way to carry to men as they carry to Him. If thou hast a design to please Him, He will have a design to please thee; if thou wilt echo to Him when He calls, He will echo to thee when thou callest.—*R. Steele.*

Even as the sun which, unto eyes being sound and without disease, is very pleasant and wholesome, but unto the same eyes, when they are feeble, sore, and weak, is very troublesome and hurtful, yet the sun is ever all one and the self-same that it was before; so God, who hath ever shown Himself benign and bountiful to those who are kind and tender-hearted towards His saints, is merciful to those who show mercy. But unto the same men, when they fall into wickedness and show themselves full of beastly cruelty, the Lord showeth Himself to be very wrathful and angry, and yet is one and the same immutable God from everlasting to everlasting.—*Cawdray.*

But doth the Lord take colour from everyone He meets, or change His temper as the company changes? That's the weakness of sinful man. He cannot do so with whom is no variableness nor shadow of changing. God is pure and upright with the unclean and hypocritical, as well as with the pure and upright, and His actions show Him to be so. God shows Himself froward with the froward, when He deals with them as He has said He will deal with the froward—deny them and reject them. God shows Himself pure with the pure when He deals with them as He has said He will—hear them and accept them. Though there be nothing in purity and sincerity which deserveth mercy, yet we cannot expect mercy without them. Our comforts are not grounded upon our graces, but they are the fruits or consequences of our graces.—*Caryl.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 29–40.

DAVID'S SONG.—PART III.

I. God can disperse the darkness of man's ignorance and cheer the night of his sorrow. There are but few thoughtful human creatures who do not feel themselves in need of some clue to guide them in their walk through life and of some hand stronger than man's to lift them up when earth's sorrows seem to weigh them to the ground; of something, in short, of a spiritual kind which shall be to their inner sense what the light is to their bodily vision. The godly in all ages have testified that their God can and does supply this want—that what the sun is to the physical nature of man the Creator of the sun is able and willing to be to the souls of His creatures. He reveals Himself as the Light of men and the Sun of Righteousness, and those who have put Him to the test declare that enough spiritual enlightenment and joy and strength are found in Him to satisfy all their needs. *Light is a revealing power*—It reveals us to ourselves. Without the light of day we could not know what we do of our own bodily structure and appearance. Light reveals itself to us while it reveals us to ourselves. There is this twofold revelation ever in operation wherever a ray of light falls. Those who walk in the light of God feel that as He reveals Himself to them, He reveals them unto themselves, and that knowledge of Him goes hand-in-hand with right conceptions of their own nature, and needs, and destiny. *Light is a gladdening influence.* Apart from all its life-giving power, the rays of the sun help to revive the sad at heart, and even the rays of a lamp or candle are cheering after long-continued darkness. So God can and does give a gladness of soul to His children which uplifts them in the dark and cloudy day of adversity, and causes them to joy in Him when all earthly sources of comfort are dried up. It was in God as this fountain of enlightenment and joy that David had found the moral strength to war life's warfare and the courage to return to the conflict after defeat and almost despair.

II. God's ways with men, and His word to them, will stand the utmost test which can be applied to them. Only those who will not trust God find flaws in His dealings, and charge Him with non-fulfilment of His promises. Those who put themselves under His guidance by opening their hearts to receive His word, enter upon such an experience of His wisdom and love, that the more they know, and the longer they live, the more settled is their conviction that the Judge of all the earth always has and ever must do right to every one of His creatures, and thus the more exultant is their song of hope for the future. David's testimony here is one with all who have exercised the same trust in God, and obeyed Him in the same spirit. The details and the form of expression change from age to age, but the principle and the spirit must ever be one. To David, God is the "*Rock*" whose "*way is perfect*," and whose "*word is tried*," to those around the sea of glass He is the "*Holy and True One, just and true in His ways.*" (Rev. vi. 10; xv. 3.) But none can arrive at this assurance without putting Him to the test. The sun would be what it is if no man upon the face of the earth opened his eyes to receive its light—the ocean would be as able to float the navies of the world if no vessel ever ventured upon its waters. To know the glory of either, and their adaptation to his needs, man must put them to the test. And as he must do with the creatures of God, so must He do in relation to God Himself.

III. The perfection of God's nature is manifested for the perfecting and uplifting of His creatures. The elevation of God above sinful men, and His

separation from them by reason of the great moral gulf between them and Him, is always dwelt upon, both by God Himself and by His inspired messengers, as a ground of hope and a reason for joy. True the High and Lofty One stands alone in His purity and glory, as the snowy mountain peak, unsullied by the impurities of the lower earth, is isolated from it by its height and grandeur; but as from *it* pour down abundant streams to give life to the dwellers below, so from *Him* flow rivers of grace to revive and glorify His needy children. The arm of His power is not outstretched with the desire to subdue by omnipotent force, but to upraise by gentleness; His Almighty strength is not displayed for the purpose of filling men with terror, but to encourage them to flee to Him for shelter, and to draw from Him the help they must have if they are to triumph over the powers of evil. All who rightly apprehend God do as David does here, see in His perfection and might matter for triumphant praise because they feel that they have been used to raise them in the past, and are assured that by them they will at last be more than conquerors.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 29. Even the children of the day sometimes need candle-light. In the darkest hour light will arise; a candle shall be lit, it will be a comfort such as we may fittingly use without dishonesty—it will be our own candle. Yet God Himself will find the holy fire with which the candle shall burn. Our evidences are our own, but their comfortable light is from above. Candles which are lit by God the devil cannot blow out. All candles are not shining, and so there are some graces which yield no present comfort, but it is well to have candles which may by-and-bye be lit, and it is well to possess grace which may yet afford us cheering evidences.—*Spurgeon.*

Ver. 30, God's warriors may expect to have a taste of every form of fighting, and must by the power of faith determine to quit themselves like men, but it behoves them to be very careful to lay all their laurels at Jehovah's feet, each one of them saying "by my God have I wrought this valiant deed."—*Spurgeon.*

Ver. 31. This is the language of one who, in his own history, combines, in a very high degree, the character of the *saint*, the *poet*, the *hero* and the *prince*. The testimony of such a man is worth having on any subject, especially on the greatest of all subjects—GOD. The authors' testimony may apply—I. *To the way which God prescribes.* He prescribes a way—a course of action—for all the creatures He has made. . . . The stars, the ocean, insects, brutes, and souls of every kind, from the least to the greatest, have each their "way" marked out, and the highest science attests that the way is "perfect." But the course or the way which is prescribed for *man* is what the writer refers to. First. *The way which is prescribed for our moral conduct is perfect.* Who can improve the decalogue? How perfect in justice and in compass is the golden rule, "Whatsoever ye would?" etc. Secondly. *The way that is prescribed for our spiritual restoration is perfect.* What is the way? Here it is: "What the law could not do," etc. "God so loved the world," etc. Faith in Christ is the prescribed way. This way is "perfect" in its *wisdom*; it is in every way adapted. "Perfect" in its *justice*—it honours the righteousness of God. "Perfect" in its *sufficiency* — it is adequate to the *needs* of each man and all. II. *To the way which God pursues.* God has a method of action. He acts, not by caprice or impulse, but by an eternal settled plan. It is but a little of that plan we can see; but so far as our knowledge of the order of nature, the history of providence, and the pro-

visions of redemption extends, we join in the testimony of the text and say: "His way is perfect. First *His method of procedure is perfect in conception.* We have not the full draft of this plan. An infinitesimal section only comes under our eye. The Architect of the great building presents you with a whole plan, and you may understand it and see the superstructure on paper. Thus God has not acted, and if He had given us the whole plan we could not have scanned the millionth part. What we see, however, we *feel* to be perfect. Secondly. *His method of procedure is perfect in execution.* What His infinite benevolence prompted and His infinite wisdom conceived, His Almightiness carried out with perfection. A conviction of the perfection of God's way (1) is essential to our well-being. Without this we cannot supremely love and trust Him. (2) Is the most attainable of beliefs. Our reason, conscience, Bible, observation, experience, all concur in urging this on the soul—this, the grandest of all conclusions. (3) Must flash on every sinner's nature sooner or later. If not here in the day of grace, yonder in the period of retribution.—*Dr. David Thomas.*

Ver. 34. When our thoughts are nimble and our spirits rapid, let us not forget that our best beloved's hand has given us the choice favour. . . . We, too, have had our *high places* of honour, service, temptation and danger, but hitherto we have been kept from falling.—*Spurgeon.*

Ver. 36. Gentleness in a deity—what other religion ever took up such a thought? When the coarse mind of sin makes up gods and a religion by its own natural light, the gods, it will be seen, reveal both the coarseness and the sin together, as they properly should. They are made great as being great in force, and terrible resentments. . . . Just opposite to all these, the God of Revelation, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, contrives to be a gentle being; even hiding His power and withholding the stress of His will, that He may put confidence and courage in the feelings of His children. . . . What, then, do we mean by gentleness? To call it sweetness of temper, kindness, patience, flexibility, indecisiveness, does not really distinguish it. When you speak, for example, of dealing gently with an enemy, you mean that instead of trying to force a point straight through with him you will give him time, and ply him indirectly with such methods and modes of forbearance as will put him on different thoughts and finally turn him to a better mind. Here, then, lies the true conception of God's gentleness. . . . It means that He does not set Himself, as a Ruler, to drive His purpose straight through, but that, consciously wise and right, . . . He is only too great to fly at His adversary, and force him to the wall if he does not instantly surrender; that, instead of coming down upon him thus, in the manner of direct onset, to carry his immediate submission by storm, He lays gentle siege to him, waiting for his willing assent and choice. . . . . That we may have it in true estimation, observe how far off it is from the practice and even the capacity generally of mankind. We can do almost anything more readily than consent to any sort of indirection, when we are resisted in the exercise of authority or encounter another at some point of violated right. . . . To redress the injury by gentleness, to humble an adversary by the circuitous approach of forbearance and a siege of true suggestion—that is not the manner of men, but only of God. . . . . How openly He takes this attitude in the Scriptures. When our first father breaks through law by his act of sin, He does not strike him down by His thunders, but He holds them back, comes to Him even by a word of promise, and sends him forth into a world unparadised by guilt, to work, and suffer, and learn, and, when he will, to turn and live. . . What we call the Gospel is only a translation, so to speak, of the gentleness of God—a matter in the world of fact, answering to a higher matter, antecedent, in

the magnanimity of God. I do not say that it is a mere effusion of Divine sentiment, apart from all counsel and government. . . . . It is at once the crown of God's purposes and of His governmental order. And . . . . that wondrous indirection of grace, the incarnate life and cross of Jesus, is the very plan to carry the precept of law by precepts higher than force, by feeling and character, and sacrifice. . . . . So, too, the Holy Spirit . . . . working efficiently, and, in a certain sense in the man, or subject, circles round the will, doing it respect by laying no force upon it, and only raising appeals to it from what He puts in the mind, the conscience, the memory, the sense of want, the fears excited, the aspirations kindled. . . . Holding this view. . . . . we ought to find that God's whole management of us and the world corresponds. Is it so? . . . . Where is the gentleness of God in the unpitying, inexorable, fated powers of the world? . . . . Just here. . . . . Able to use force, He can use character, and time, and kindness. Real gentleness supposes counsel, order, end, and a determinate will. Not even a weak woman can be properly called gentle. . . . . See how it goes with us in God's management of our experience. Doing everything to work on our feeling, temperament, thought, will, and so on our eternal character He still does nothing by direct impulsion. It is with us here in everything as it was with Jonah when the Lord sent him to Nineveh. . . . . Jonah steers straight the other way, and there puts to sea, sailing off upon it, and then under it, and through the belly of hell, and comes to land nobody knows where. After much perambulation he gets to Nineveh, and gives his message doggedly, finally to be tamed by a turn of hot weather and the withering of a gourd. . . . The subject culminates in the end God has in view, which is to make us great. He certainly has a different opinion of greatness from that which is commonly held by men—a much higher respect for the capabilities of our human nature, and much higher designs concerning it. . . . We do not understand Him, in fact, till we conceive it as a truth that He wants to make us great in will in the breadth and freedom of our intellect, great in courage, enthusiasm, self-respect, firmness, superiority to things and matters of condition, great in sacrifice and beneficence, great in sonship with Himself, great in being raised to such common counsel and such intimate unity with Him in His ends—that we do, in fact, reign with Him. . . . . His object is to gain our will in such a manner as to save it, and make it finally a thousand-fold stouter in good, ... and to recover our intellect by bidding us to set it for seeing by a wholly right intent and a willingness even to die for the truth, ... and so He manages to save all the attributes of force and magnanimity within us while reducing us to love and obedience.

Easy enough were it for Him to lay His force upon us, and dash our obstinacy to the ground. He might not thrust us into love, He could not into courage and confidence, but He might instantly crush out all wilfulness for ever. . . . But He wants no slaves about His throne, and . . . therefore refuses to subdue us unless by some such method that we may seem, in a certain other sense, to subdue ourselves.—*Bushnell.*

Ver. 37. It is no small mercy to be brought into full Christian liberty and enlargement, but it is a still greater favour to be enabled to walk worthily in such liberty, not being permitted to slip with our feet. To stand upon the rock of affliction is the result of gracious upholding, but that aid is quite as much needed in the luxurious plains of prosperity.—*Spurgeon.*

Ver. 42. As nature prompteth men in an extremity to look up for help; but because it is but the prayer of flesh for ease, and not of the spirit for grace, and a good use of calamities, and not but in extreme despair of help

elsewhere, therefore God hears them not. "They looked," etc., *q.d.* If they could have made any other shift, God should never have heard of them. *Trapp.*

Ver. 45. In many cases the gospel is speedily received by hearts apparently unprepared for it. Those who have never heard the gospel before have been charmed by its first message, and yielded obedience to it; while others, alas, who are accustomed to its joyful sound, are rather hardened than softened by its teachings. The grace of God sometimes runs as fire among stubble, and a nation is born in a day. "Love at first sight" is no uncommon thing when Jesus is the wooer. He can write Cæsar's message without boasting, *Veni, vidi, vici;* His gospel is sometimes no sooner heard than believed.—*Spurgeon.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 47–51.

DAVID'S SONG.—PART IV.

I. That Jehovah lives ought to be enough to satisfy every human soul. All that David has said or can say is wrapped up in the words, "The Lord liveth." That God lives is a sufficient guarantee, not only that His children will live, but that the best that is possible will be done for them and with them. Man feels conscious that he does not exist of himself and that he needs a stronger, a better, a higher life than his own upon which he can rest and whence he can draw supplies. In God, those who seek, find this need supplied—they testify, "*With Thee is the fountain of life, in thy light shall we see light*" (Ps. xxxvi. 9). They feel that the bodily and the spiritual life they now possess is from this living Jehovah, that He who gave them existence has given them what alone makes it worth having, a participation in His own Divine nature (2 Pet. i. 4), and they rejoice in the confidence that while He lives they shall also live in the highest and best sense of the word. The life of God is a life separated from all injustice and unkindness, and it is a life not merely without any shadow of unrighteousness but a life of active justice and mercy. This being so, His existence ought to be for all men what it was to the Psalmist, a ground for hope and exultation. We cannot explain all the mysteries of His dealings with the children of men, some of David's own words here do but remind us that clouds and darkness are often round about Him, but the simple fact of the existence of such a God is a rock upon which we may rest.

II. Every human life lived to purpose is lived in dependence upon the living God. It is David's constant testimony that so far as he had fulfilled the high destiny to which he had been called, he had done so by remembering that he was nothing and that God was everything. "*The Lord is my strength,*" was his watchword on the day when he slew the giant, and, with few exceptions, it continued to be so until the hour in which he went "the way of all the earth" (1 Kings ii. 2). He has left it upon record that every deed of his life that had been worth doing had been done in dependence upon the Lord who took him from the sheepfold and who had never failed him whenever he had sought His help. Every man who has lived a life worth living has lived it by putting his trust in David's God, and every life has been worth living that has been so lived. The narrow circle of every man's experience, and the wider range of history, furnish abundant proofs how poor a record the greatest leave behind them when they try to stand alone, and how blessed and honoured is the memory of many a lowly servant of God, who, when on earth, lived a life of faith, and therefore was

enabled to fulfil the end of his being. But it is not only obscure lives that have been thus en-nobled—all the greatest names that adorn the pages of human history belong to those who have said with David, "*God is my strength and power*" and with Paul, "*Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*" (Gal ii. 20).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 47. A certain sense of solitariness grows upon a man as he becomes older. Those who were venerable in his youthful days, and to whom he looked for counsel, are one by one carried to the tomb. The companions of his early manhood fall at his side. He comes at length to a time when he does not care to make many new friends; and when he reaches the limit of three-score years and ten, he begins to feel himself almost a stranger, even in the place where he has spent his life. Perhaps a king, more than most other men, will realize this experience. The poet has spoken of "the lonely glory of a throne." The monarch has no equals, and, from the nature of the case, can have few confidants and counsellors, except such as are venerable for age. But as his reign wears on, one after another of these early friends are taken away; and as each is removed, he is apt to think that a part of himself has been withdrawn from him. Thus loneliness steals over him, and he comes at length to be, like Moses among the tribes, the solitary survivor of a buried generation. Something like this, I doubt not, was felt by David as he advanced into old age. Samuel was gone; Jonathan was no more; Ahithophel had proved a traitor; Joab had become a thorn in his side; but there was One always true, and it was with no ordinary emotion, we may be sure, that out of his earthly solitude he sang of his fidelity and deathlessness: "The Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation." Let the aged among us fall back on this assurance, and find their solace in the companionship of the Most High. He hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."—*Dr Taylor.*

Why do you not boast in your God and bear up yourselves big with your expectations from him? Do you not see young heirs to great estates act and spend accordingly? And why shall you, being the King of Heaven's son, be lean and ragged from day to day, as though you were not worth a groat? Oh, sirs, live upon your portion; chide yourselves for living beside what you have! There are great and precious promises; rich, enriching mercies; you may make use of God's all-sufficiency; you can blame none but yourselves if you be defective or discouraged. . . . Ask your fainting spirits under pressing outward sorrows, is not God alive? And why, then, doth not thy soul revive? Why doth thy heart die within thee when comforts die? Cannot a living God support thy dying hopes?—*Oliver Heywood.*

Ver. 50. Paul cites this verse (Rom. xv. 9). This is clear evidence that David's Lord is here, but David is here too, and is to be viewed as an example of a holy soul making its boast in God, even in the presence of ungodly men. Who are the despisers of God that we should stop our mouths for them? We will sing to our God whether they like it or no, and force upon them the knowledge of His goodness. Too much politeness to traitors may be treason to our King.—*Spurgeon.*

Whole chapter. This psalm is called by Michaelis more artificial, and less truly terrible, than the Mosaic odes. In structure it may be so, but surely not in spirit. It appears to many besides us, one of the most magnificent lyrical raptures in the Scriptures. As if the poet had dipped his pen in "the brightness of that light which was before his eye; so he describes the

descending God. Perhaps it may be objected that the *nodus* is hardly worthy of the *vindex*—to deliver David from his enemies, could Deity ever be imagined to come down? But the objector knows not the character of the ancient Hebrew mind. God in His view had not to descend from heaven; He was nigh—a cloud like a man's hand might conceal—a cry, a look, might bring him down. And why should not David's fancy clothe Him, as He came, in a panoply befitting His dignity, in clouds spangled with coals of fire? If he was to descend, why not in state? The proof of the grandeur of this psalm is in the fact that it has borne the test of almost every translation, and made doggerel itself erect itself and become Divine. Even Sternhold and Hopkins its fiery whirlwind lifts up, purifies, touches into true power and then throws down, helpless and panting, upon their ancient common. Perhaps its great charm, apart from the poetry of the descent, is the exquisite and subtle alternation of *I* and *Thou*. We have spoken of parallelism, as the key to the mechanism of Hebrew song We find this existing between David and God—the delivered and the Deliverer—beautifully pursued throughout the whole of this psalm. . . . It has been ingeniously argued that the existence of the *I* suggests inevitably as a polar opposite the thought of the *Thou*, that the personality of man proves thus the personality of God; but, be this as it may, David's perception of that personality is nowhere so intense as here. He seems not only to see, but to feel and touch, the object of his gratitude and worship.—*Gillfilan.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY NOTES. Ver. 1. **Words**, rather, *Divine sayings*, i.e., prophetic utterances. Keil thus translates the verse:

> "Divine saying of David the son of Jesse,
> Divine saying of the man, the highly exalted
> Of the anointed of the God of Jacob," etc.

"The following words of David are thereby announced to be a peculiarly prophetic declaration which rests on an inspeaking of God by His Spirit to His soul." (*Erdmann*). This introduction to the prophetic announcement rests, both as to form and substance, upon the last sayings of Balaam concerning the future history of Israel. (Num. xxiv. 3-15). This not only shows to what extent David had occupied himself with the utterances of the earlier men of God concerning Israel's future, but indicates, at the same time, that his own prophetic utterance was intended to be a further expansion of Balaam's prophecy concerning the star out of Jacob and the sceptre of Israel. Like Balaam, he calls his prophecy a *Divine saying*, or oracle, as a revelation which he had received direct from God. (Num. xxiv. 3). But the recipient of this revelation was not, like Balaam the son of Beor, a man with closed eye, whose eyes had been opened by a vision of the Almighty, but "*the man who was raised up on high*," i.e., whom God had lifted up out of humiliation to be the ruler of His people, yea, even to be the head of the nations. Chap. xxii. 44). (*Kiel*), "A statement of the grounds on which it was to be expected that he would be employed as an agent of God in the utterance of this important prophecy."—(*Jamieson*).

Ver. 2. "**Spake**," Rather, *speaketh*, i.e., in the following revelation. "**On my tongue.**" The parallelism here employed is obviously gradational, in which the idea introduced in the former member is continued, but amplified in the latter. *(Henderson.)* "While in verse 1 the *prophetic organ* of the Divine saying is doubly characterised, verse 2 sets forth in two-fold expression the *two-fold* Divine medium of the inspired prophetic word." (*Erdmann.*)

Ver. 3. "**God . . Rock.**" "To indicate that the contents of His prophecy relate to the salvation of the people of Israel, and are guaranteed by the faithfulness of God." (*Keil.*) "**Said . . . Speaks.**" Rather, "*Saith . . . Speaketh.*" "**He that ruleth.**" This should be—"*A ruler over men—just—A ruler in the fear of God.*" It evidently refers exclusively

to the Messiah, as in Isa. xi. 2, 3. and is a sentence abrupt and isolated; not, as Erdmann remarks, syntactically connected either with verse 2 or 4.

Ver. 4. All the figures in this verse express the *blessings* of the Messiah's rain. He is *not* personally, as the English version makes it appear, the subject of the verse.

Ver. 5. "**Although . . . . yet.**" Here, again, the English version must be rejected. The verse read correctly is—"*For is not my house so with God. For He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, provided with all, and attested. For all my salvation and all good pleasure should He not make it to grow?* The covenant referred to is the promise made in chap. vii. 12, which is said to be *guarded* or *provided* with all that can secure its fulfilment. "*My salvation*, *i.e.*, the salvation promised, assured to me and my seed. The *pleasure* must be taken (as the salvation is from God) as—what is well-pleasing to God, not—what is well-pleasing to me." (*Erdmann.*)

Vers. 6, 7. "As thorns are extirpated out of a land that is about to be brought under culture, so wicked men will disappear from the kingdom of the Messiah—the wicked enemies and persecutors of this kingdom of righteousness. They resemble those prickly thorny plants which are twisted together, whose spires point in every direction, and are so sharp and strong that they cannot be approached without danger; but hard instruments and violent means must be taken to destroy or uproot them. (*Jamieson.*) "**In the same place.**" "*Where they dwell*, or, *on the spot.* (*Kimchi* and *Kiel.*) Erdmann and others read, "*so that there should be an end of them.*"

Ver. 8. "**Tachmonite**" Rather, *Ben Hachmoni*, of the family of *Hachmon*, not as in 1 Chron. xxvii. 32, a *son*, because in verse 8 of that chapter, Zabdiel is mentioned as his father. "**Chief,**" "not *leader*, but most distinguished." (*Erdmann.*) "**Captains,**" or *knights.* (*Erdmann.*) "**Eight hundred.**" "This is not to be understood as signifying that he killed eight hundred men at one blow, but that in a battle he threw his spear again and again at the foe, until eight hundred men had been slain. The Chronicles gives three hundred instead of eight hundred; and as that number occurs again in verse 18, it probably found its way from that verse into this in the book of Chronicles.

Vers. 9-11. There are some variations between the reading here and in the parallel account in 1 Chron. xi., but many of the apparent discrepancies are easily accounted for when we remember that they *may be* independent records, and are not necessarily copied one from the other. "**Only to spoil,**" *i.e.*, they had nothing to do but enter in and enjoy the fruits of the victory. **Hararite**, "perhaps the mountaineer." (*Wordsworth*). **A troop.** Erdmann, Ewald, and Thenius translate this word as the name of the place, viz., *Lehi.* (See Judges xv. 9). **Lentiles.** "In the Chronicles it is added there was barley there. Doubtless the field (or large plain) was sown with both; the independence of the two writers is thus shown." (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 13. **Three of the thirty chiefs**; or, *the three chiefs of the thirty.* The *thirty* are those enumerated at the end of the chapter. Thirty-one (or thirty-two) are there mentioned, and more in Chronicles, but this was evidently a name for a certain corps of men, which, as Kiel suggests, possibly at first numbered exactly thirty, but which would at times receive additions in the different wars in which David was engaged. **Adullam.** "According to the situation here described, this exploit occurred in the Philistine war, narrated in chap. v. 17, *sq.*" (*Erdmann*).

Ver. 15. **Well of Bethlehem.** "An ancient cistern, with four or five holes in the solid rock, at about ten minutes' distance to the north of the eastern corner of the hill of Bethlehem, is pointed out by the natives as Bir-Daoud—David's well. Dr. Robinson doubts the identity of the well; but others think that there are no good grounds for doing so. Certainly, considering this to be the ancient well, Bethlehem must have once extended ten minutes further to the north, and must have lain, in times of old, not as now on the summit, but on the northern rise of the hill; for the well is by, or (1 Chron. xi. 7) *at* the gate. (*Jamieson*). "I find in the descriptions of travellers that the common opinion is, that David's captains had come from the south-east, in order to obtain, at the risk of their lives, the so much longed for water; while it is supposed that David was then himself in the great cave that is not far from the south-east of Bethlehem; which cave is generally held to have been that of Adullam. But (Josh. xv. 35). Adullam lay "in the valley"—that is, in the undulating plain at the western base of the mountains of Judea, and consequently to the south-west of Jerusalem. Be this as it may, David's *three men* had, in any case, to break through the host of the Philistines in order to reach the well; and the position of Bir-Daoud agrees well with this. (*Van de Velde*). Dr. Thomson (Land and the Book) says that Bethlehem is now poorly supplied with water.

Ver. 17. "**In jeopardy,**" etc., *for the price of their souls*, *i.e.*, at the risk of their lives. "The water drawn and fetched at the risk of their lives is compared to the soul itself, and the soul is in the blood. (Lev. xvii. 11.) Drinking this water, therefore, would be nothing else than drinking their blood." (*Keil.*)

Ver. 19. *Chief among three.* As the historian says further on that, neither Abishai nor Benniah attained unto *the three* (so the Heb.); it seems better to read here *chief among thirty, i.e.*, they distinguished themselves among those heroes, but were not so renowned as those mentioned in verses 8–12.

Ver. 20. "Lion-like men." Literally, *Ariels*, or *Lions of God.* The Arabs and Persians so designate every remarkably brave men, and these were doubtless two celebrated Moabitish warriors. "Pit," or *Cistern.* "The lion had been driven into the neighbourhood of human habitations by a heavy fall of snow, and had taken refuge in a cistern." (*Keil and others.*)

Ver. 21. "An Egyptian." Better *The Egyptian*, some well-known man, celebrated for his strength and stature. "A goodly man," lit. *a man of appearances* or (as in Chronicles) a *man of measure.*

Ver. 22. "Three mighty." Here also it seems necessary to read *Thirty* instead of *Three.* (See on ver. 19.)

Ver. 24–39. Most of these names are not further known. "Shammah." Must not be confounded with the Shammahs mentioned in vers. 11 and 33. (*Keil.*) "Ittai." "Must be distinguished from the Gathite." (*Keil.*) "Eliphelet," etc. Many Hebrew scholars consider that there is here a slight error, as there is no reason why the grandfather's name should be given in addition to that of the father, and it better suits the grammatical form of some of the words to read—*Eliphelet the son of Ur*; *Hepher the Maachathite*, thus adding one to the list.

Ver. 39. "Thirty-seven." "This number is correct, as there were three in the first class (verses 8-12), two in the second (verses 18-23), and thirty-two in the third (verses 24-39), since verse 34 contains three names according to the amended text." (*Kiel.*) (See above on *Eliphelet*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1–7.

DAVID'S PROPHECY.

I. That God has spoken to man is a fact of human history. Reflection upon the aspect of things around us, and especially upon the nature and needs of man, would lead us to expect that God would break the silence of eternity and let His voice be heard by the children of time. When a vessel is built to sail upon unknown seas, the builder and owner of the ship does not consider her complete without the compass, by means of which she can make her way safely to distant ports and so fulfil the end for which she came into existence. A good human father, knowing the moral perils to which his children are exposed, will not leave them without the benefits of such moral instruction as he is able to impart to them. He would be a cruel man indeed if he permitted his children to grow up without giving them the benefits of his own larger experience and superior knowledge—without furnishing them with the best rules for the guidance of their lives which he was able to frame. Men find themselves strangers on the earth—compelled, whether they will or no, to cross the stormy and mysterious sea of life, and they naturally look to Him to whom they owe their being for some guidance to a haven of rest and satisfaction at the close of the voyage. They know how carefully a good earthly father provides, so far as he is able, for all the needs of his children; and reasoning from the creature to the Creator, they conclude that God must have so provided for their spiritual needs, especially as He so bountifully and constantly supplies their bodily wants. Thoughtful men in past ages were driven to the conclusion that God would thus speak to men; and we, who possess the book which claims to be the revelation of His mind and will, accept it because reason and analogy lead us to feel that such a revelation must be, and that the Bible records an undoubted fact when it declares that it has taken place.

II. That God should speak by one man to many, and by some for all, is in accordance with the social constitution of all things around us. In all de-

partments of life we find that blessings come to man through man—that the gifts of God as a rule do not come to us direct from heaven, but through the medium and ministration of those who are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Not only so, but the most precious and valued benefits do not come through *every* man or *any* man, but through men who seem to be specially gifted and elected to be the channels of such good things. One great scientific discoverer is the means of bringing enlightenment and elevation to many generations, another unfolds a secret by which the pain and suffering of thousands is lessened or done away with. A great statesman brings peace and prosperity to the homes of hundreds of his countrymen, and a philanthrophist lifts up a generation of down-trodden men and women, and causes them to sing for joy. When God gave to man that greatest of His gifts—a knowledge of Himself—He did but work in harmony with His own constituted methods when He made known His will first to prophets and apostles, that through human hearts and by human lips the goodwill of God to the race might be made known.

III. **What God has spoken reveals His desire that the rule of heaven should become the rule of earth.** One reason why the rule of heaven is the rule of justice is because its King can make no mistake as to what justice really is. Human creatures in power are sometimes unjust through ignorance of the merits of the case. They cannot be so perfectly acquainted with all the circumstances of those under their authority as to act at all times with strict impartiality. But blessed be God, it is not so with Him. He who made man knows what is in him and around him, and cannot therefore err in His judgment. And all that He has said and done shows Him to be no less desirous than capable of thus dealing righteously with the children of men. He has found the Ruler who alone is able to bring about this reign of righteousness upon the earth. His beloved Son can misjudge none through ignorance, and His perfect holiness makes it certain He will not abuse the power which He holds in His hand. In His life and death we read the desires and purposes of God concerning us, and when He speaks we hear the voice of Him who sits upon the throne of the universe, saying, "A just God and a Saviour, there is none beside Me" (Isa. xlv. 21). In proportion as men listen to Him, and follow His guidance, will heaven be begun upon earth, and the darkness of sin and sorrow be dispersed by the rise of this Sun of Righteousness. It is to this end that "*God spake in times past by the prophets,*" and has "*in these last days spoken by His Son.*" (Heb. i. 1.)

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. Religion, it has been contended, is not the proper theme of poetry. . . . . But if poetry be adapted to body forth the noblest conceptions, and to breathe the language of stirring emotion, where is the theme that presents a field so sublime as religion, or awakens emotions so fervent? . . . . The most daring flights fall far short of the elevation which such themes will justify; the most glowing language cannot exaggerate such emotion. Must the noblest forms of language be restricted to embattled fields of earth and to the petty strifes and achievements of men? . . . No, let poetry rise amid the roll of cherubic wheels and the rushing of cherubic wings; let her glow with seraphic ardour and learn seraphic strains; let her celebrate the redeeming work, and put hymns into the lips of those who, struggling with emotions which they have no language to utter, find in the bold and tender stanzas which consecrated talent has put forth, the impassioned strains that both express and excite their piety. Were

examples asked it might be shown that poetry is the selected form in which prophets embodied their inspired vaticinations, and the Psalms might be adduced as so many lyrical compositions exclusively dedicated to devotion. —*John Ely.*

Ver. 4. The chief idea of the emblem—the grass shining clearly after rain—is that of *growth*—fresh, healthy, beautiful development and progress—steady, silent advance in holiness. In individuals under his precious influence the graces of the new creation are seen ripening, the understanding becoming more clear, the will more firm, the conscience more vigorous, the habits more holy, the temper more serene, the affections more pure, the desires more heavenly. In communities conversions are multiplied, and souls advance steadily in holy beauties; intelligence spreads, love triumphs over selfishness, and the expansive, genial spirit of Christ drives out the bitter spirit of strife and the dry spirit of mammon.—*Blaikie.*

Like the spring, so is also the reign of grace, a joyous, busy time, wherein Messiah makes us righteous and God-fearing, so that we become green, blooming, fragrant, and grow and become fruitful. And now go so; Who lives in spring he dies no more; who dies in winter he lives no more, for the sun goes away from the latter; but to the former the sun rises up of which David prophesies. Where the sun, Christ, does not shine clear, the spring also is not pleasant; but Moses with the law's thunder makes everything dreadful and quite deadly. But here, in Messiah's time, says David, when He shall reign over Israel itself, with grace to make us righteous and save us, it will be as delightful as the best time in spring, when before day there has been a delightful warm rain, that is, the consoling gospel has been preached, and quickly thereupon the sun, Christ, comes up in our heart through right faith without Moses' clouds and thunder and lightning. Then all proceeds to grow, to be green and blooming, and the day is rich in joy and peace.—*Luther.*

Vers. 6 and 7. Some regard Christ's sceptre as one of mercy only, but the uniform representation of the Bible is different. There is an ominous combination of mercy and judgment in this, as in most predictions of Christ's kingly glory. In the bosom of one of Isaiah's sweetest promises, the Messiah declares that He was anointed to proclaim "the day of vengeance of our God." . . . . It could not be otherwise. The union of mercy and judgment is the inevitable result of that *righteousness* which is the foundation of His government. Sin is the abominable thing which He hates. To separate men from sin is the grand object of His rule. For this end, He draws His people into union with Himself; . . . . but as for those who refuse to part with their sin, ... the sin that is within them cannot abide in His holy kingdom, and as they refuse to let their sin be destroyed and their persons saved, nothing remains but that they and their sins perish together.—*Blaikie.*

Vers. 1–7. True preaching is always a prophetic testimony. I. *As to its origin:* the spirit of the Lord speaks through it. II. *As to its contents:* the word of the Lord is upon its tongue. III. *As to its subjects:* the mysteries of God's saving purpose, which only God's Spirit can explain; the great deeds of God's grace, which can be proclaimed only on the ground of personal, inner experience, and of one's own seeing and hearing; and the future affairs of God's kingdom, in the manifestation of Divine salvation and Divine judgment, which only the eye illuminated by the light and of the Spirit can behold.—*Erdmann.*

The *prophetic photograph* of the future *ruler* in the *prophecy* of David answers in its outlines to the counterpart of the *fulfilment* in Christ, and this:—I. In respect to His *personal appearing*, perfect righteousness, and holiness in complete fear of God (re-

ligious ethical perfection). II. In respect to the *extent* of His royal dominion, He is ruler over men, universality of world dominion. III. In respect to the foundations of His kingdom, the *promises* of God. IV. In respect to the *activity* and *effects* of his royal rule, on the one hand in the enlightening, warming, animating, and fructifying *light* of his manifestations of grace and blessings of salvation; on the other hand, in the *fire* of His judgment consuming all ungodliness. —*Erdmann.*

The prophetic element, which appears in David's Messianic psalms, comes out most strongly here. In Nathan's promise and prophecy David is merely passively receptive, and his prayer is only the echo of the Divine word he has received, but here he rises to the highest prophetic action, which pre-supposes indeed a passive bearing towards the Divine saying (the *Neum*), by which he receives an *immediate* revelation in plastic form of what he had previously received as a promise *through* Nathan.—*Erdmann.*

A blessed end, when, in *looking back* upon the path of life that lies behind, one has nothing to utter but gratitude and praise; when, in *looking around* upon his own life's acquisitions and his possession of salvation, all self-glorying is silent, and only the testimony to God's grace and mercy, that has done all and given all, comes upon the lips. When, in *looking forward* into the future of God's kingdom upon earth, on the ground of the grace experienced in life, one's faith becomes a prophet, beholding the ways along which the Lord brought His Kingdom through darkness to light; through conflict to victory.—*Erdmann.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8–39.

THE MIGHTY MEN AND THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM.

I. There is a loyalty in noble natures which seeks occasions of self-sacrifice. Satan very greatly belied even our fallen human nature when he said, "*Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life*" (Job ii. 4). Here he shows either his ignorance or his malice, for millions of men and women have proved its falsity. No generation has ever lived upon the earth in which some have not been found willing to risk their lives, not merely in obedience to the voice of conscience, or out of gratitude to Christ and for the sake of spreading His gospel, but as David's mighty men did here, with a devotion which seemed on the watch for an opportunity to manifest its depth. We should have good reason to admire these warriors if they had fought their way to Bethlehem's gate to rescue their master from the hands of the Philistines, or to procure for him some necessary food or drink. Such a deed would have entitled them to receive the well-done of faithful servants and would have established their claim to David's grateful love. But in braving death to gratify a passing wish of their king they went far beyond the strictest requirements of duty, and their conduct is a striking proof of the fact that the noblest natures find their purest gratification in self-sacrifice—in laying all that they have and are at the feet of another.

II. Those who are the objects of deep affection should be watchful of the claims they make upon it. David's desire was perfectly natural and lawful, and it was not wrong to express it. But it was certainly somewhat inconsiderate, seeing that he must have known the kind of men who surrounded him. Probably, however, he did not dream that the utterance of his wish would have such a result, and we may well believe that his experience now made him more careful in the future when such brave and loving friends were near. It behoves all who are deeply and tenderly loved to be very mindful how strong such love

's and how much it will do and bear for the object of its love. True it is that self-devotion raises and gladdens the soul that exercises it, but none but the utterly mean man could use this truth to excuse his own selfishness. Let such an one remember that he loses in proportion as the other gains, and let all be so anxious to find out and gratify the desires of those who love them as to have no room to express their own.

III. Heroic deeds have a tendency to beget others after their kind. It is quite possible that David's mighty men became what they were through association with him. He had set them many noble examples of bravery and self-forgetfulness, and they had been apt pupils of a worthy master. And now their deed of loyal daring begets in him one of the same kind. When men thus seek to equal and out-do each other in bringing their lower nature into subjection to the higher, and in seeking who shall be the greater in acts of loving service, then, indeed, is a warfare carried on which is all gain and no loss, and where both sides gain a victory worth having.

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

I. The three warriors must be surveyed as servants of David, men engaged to obey his commands and execute his will to the utmost of their power. And their conduct then appears very admirable, as far removed as can well be imagined from that calculating and niggardly obedience which betrays a disposition to do the least possible, to render as little to a master as that master can be prevailed on to accept. . . . . David might have summoned the bravest of his battalions and bidden them attempt the forcing a passage to the well, but he simply uttered a wish, . . . and it was sufficient for the bold and true-hearted men. . . . There is an example set to every man who is called upon for obedience, which fits the history before us to be inscribed on our kitchens, our shops, and our churches. The example lies in their not having waited for a command, but acted on a wish, and there is no man to whom the term servant applies—and it applies to every man, at least with reference to God—who would not do well to ponder the example. . . . Consider men generally as the servants of God. . . . He dealeth with us as with children, rather not laying down an express precept for every possible case, but supposing in us a principle which will always lead to our considering what will be pleasing to Himself, and to our taking His pleasure as our rule. . . . And the Christian should search for the least indication of God's will, and give it all the form of a positive statute. . . . II. Then what care should there be that nothing may be said in joke which may be taken in earnest, nothing even hinted at as our belief or desire which we would not have acted upon by those who hear our words. It is specially to children that this remark applies; for they may be supposed to have all that submissiveness to authority and that willingness to oblige which distinguished David's warriors, as well as the inability of discriminating a casual expression from an actual direction. . . . There may occur precisely what occurred with David's servants. It is not that the monarch has commanded his warriors to dare death . . . or even wished them to undertake the rash and perilous enterprise. It is only that, without reflection or thought, he gave utterance to something that was passing in his mind, and that those about him overheard the inconsiderate expression. And do you mark that young person, who is devoting himself with uncalculating eagerness to some worldly pursuit. . . . . The parent never wished him thus to squander his

powers; the parent never thought that he would . . . . but was apt to give words to feelings which he would never have breathed, had he remembered the possibility of their being received as genuine, or interpreted as laudable. . . . III. But the genuineness of the repentance of David . . . . . is proved by his refusal to derive benefit from his sin. . . . . And we are now concerned with the question as to what is binding on a man, if, with the advantages, procured by a fault, lying at his disposal, the water from the well of Bethlehem sparkling before him, he become convinced of his fault? . . . Is he to drink of the water, to enjoy the advantages? It may often be a hard question, but we do not see how there can be any true penitence, where what has been wrongfully obtained is kept and used. . . . Let the case be that which is not unlikely to occur amid the complicated interests of a great mercantile community. . . . We cannot think it enough to give large sums in charity as an atonement or reparation. . . . Zaccheus made an accurate distinction between restitution and almsgiving; he would give alms of that only which had been honourably obtained; the rest he returned, with large interest, to those from whom it had been unfairly procured. And though it might be impossible for the trader to make restitution precisely to the parties who have been injured, we do not see how, with his conscience accusing him of having done wrong, he can lawfully appropriate any share of the profits any more than David could have lawfully drunk of the water procured at his ill-advised wish.—*Canon Melville.*

A knightly deed this! But was it not rather foolhardiness, if not downright servility, and was not this expending courage recklessly, and dealing wastefully with human life? This question resembles that with which Judas Iscariot presumed to censure the anointing of Mary at Bethany. True love has its measure in itself, and in its modes of manifestation puts itself beyond all criticism.—*Krummacher.*

In David's conduct to the heroes that bring him water from Bethlehem at the risk of their lives are set forth these three things:—I. *Noble modesty*, which regards the love-offering of one's neighbour as too dear and valuable for one's self and declines to receive it. II. Sincere *humility* before the Lord, which lays the honour at His feet as He to whom alone it belongs. III. A clear view and tender estimation of the infinite moral *worth of human life* in men's relations towards one another and towards God.—*Erdmann.*

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 1. "Again." Evidently referring to the famine mentioned in chap. xxi. 1-14. **"Israel."** Some special national guilt not specified must be here referred to. If, as most writers suppose, this occurred in the closing years of David's life it may be the rebellion under Absalom. **"He."** Attempts have been made to translate here impersonally, *David was moved*, etc.; and in Chronicles the instigation is attributed to Satan. But the grammatical construction will not admit of any other rendering, and the expression has parallels in other parts of Scripture, and must be read in the light of what is revealed to us of the Divine character. (See 1 Sam. xxvi. 19, 2 Sam. xvi. 10.) On these passages Kiel says: "They show that God only instigates those who have sinned against Him to evil deeds; and therefore that the instigation consists in the fact that God compels sinners to manifest the wickedness of their hearts in deeds, or furnishes the opportunity and occasion for the unfolding and practical manifestation of the evil desires of his heart, that the sinner may either be brought to the knowledge of his more evil ways and also to repentance, through the evil deed and its consequences, or if the heart should be hardened still more by the evil deed, that it may become ripe for the judgment

of death. Erdmann remarks that "the conception that God incites to sin in the Old Testament belongs to the same circle of thought as the idea, carried over by Paul into the New Testament, of man's *hardening* in sin as a Divine act. The hardening pertains only to the inner being, to heart and disposition (which becomes insusceptible to the influences of the Divine word and spirit), to the will, which persistently sets itself against God's holy will, to the ethical habits of the whole personality, etc. . . . The Divine *incitement to evil* on the other hand refers to individual acts, and consists not in God's producing evil, which would be inconsistent with his holiness (comp. James i., 19), but in his occasioning the evil to break forth from the hidden depths of the heart and realise itself in deed, though this need neither pre-suppose nor induce hardening, but is rather intended to be the mean and avenue to the salvation and bettering of the sinner." Hengstenberg's comments on Psalm xli. 6 apply well to this subject. "Sin pertains, indeed, to man. He may always free himself from it by penitence. But if he does *not* repent, then the *forms* in which sin exhibits itself are no longer under his control, but under God's dispensation," etc. But it is perhaps safer to leave this very difficult subject by saying, in the words of the American translator of Lange's Commentary, that "there is here involved the whole subject of the co-relation of Divine and human action, about which we can only insist on the two unharmonisable facts of the absolute efficient control of God, and the complete independence of man." (See also Hengstenberg on verse 3.)

Ver. 2. "**Number**," or *muster*. From verse 9 it appears that this numbering was of a military character, and the aim of David was, most likely, to ascertain the fighting power of the people.

Ver. 3. "**How many soever**," literally, *as he is*. Joab's words show that this census was quite different from that taken by Moses at the command of God. (Exod. xxx. 12; Numbers i. and xxvi.) He evidently regarded it at least as impolitic. Several views are held as to the nature of David's sin in the act, but, as Erdmann remarks, Joab's remonstrance "indicates David's purpose to be to please himself with the exhibition of the imposing military strength of the people; and the ungodly feature, therefore, was its motive, David's haughty estimation of himself and his people. His sin was one both of the *lust of the eyes* and *pride*. . . . . Doubtless he who had led Israel to so lofty a height, forgetting himself before the Lord, had a proud desire to exhibit the splendid array of his people's military strength, as a pledge of the further advance of his house and people, and of the further development of the promise in Deut. xxxiii. 29." "The nature of David's sin is declared by the sacred writer, saying that it was prompted by Satan, the author of pride and unbelief; . . . . it was the sin of lack of faith in God, and in His protection; it was the sin of self confidence, vain glory, and reliance on an arm of flesh." (*Wordsworth*). "Warlike thoughts certainly stand in the back-ground; if we fail to see this, we lose the key to the whole transaction. David feeds his heart on the great numbers, on the thought of what his successors on the throne would be able to attain with such power. From its first origin Israel was called to the supremacy of the world. Already this assurance was given (Deut. xxxiii. 29). David now thought he could rise, step by step, to such elevation without the help of God, who had provided for the beginning. The records should bear witness to all time that he had laid a solid foundation for this great work of the future. Had his perception been clear, he would not have disregarded the special hint contained in the law respecting the danger connected with the numbering of the people. In Exod. xxx. 11, it is ordained that on the numbering of the people every Israelite should bring a ransom, "that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them." By this they would be released, as it were, from the death incurred by their proud arrogance. It reminded them of the danger of forgetting human weakness, so imminent where an individual feels himself the member of a large whole. . . . . With this feeling even the Romans presented offerings of atonement at their census. . . . . In Psa. xxx., which has reference to this event, David himself describes the state of his mind, which offered a point of contact for the temptation According to this, confidence was the melancholy root of sin, both in David and the nation. Soft indolence, says Calvin, had taken possession of his mind, so that he had no inclination for prayer, nor any dependence on the mercy of God, but trusted too much to his past fortune. Where this corrupt disposition is found in the soul, God's influence making use of Satan as its instrument, leads the corrupt germ to its development, rousing to action that which slumbers in the soul in order to bring about the retributive judgment in which man, if otherwise well intentioned, learns fully to recognise his sinful condition, and is moved to repentance. The question is not one of simple permission on the part of God, but of a real action, and that of a nature which each one may still perceive in his own tendencies. Whoever once yields to his sinful disposition is infallibly involved in the sinful deed which leads to retributive judgment, however much he may strive against it." (*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 5. "**Pitched**," *i.e.*, encamped in the open country because of the great numbers who would assemble. "**Aroer . . . river of Gad.**" Rather, the "**brook-valley**," etc. There was another *Aroer* in Reuben, and one mentioned only in 1 Sam. xxx. 28. This town is generally considered to be identical with the one near Rabbah mentioned in Num. xxxii. 34 and Joshua xiii. 35. Some travellers identify it with the modern *Ayra*, but there is much uncer-

tainty about its precise position. "**Jazer.**" Mentioned several times in Joshua and in Numbers, and sometimes spelt *Ja-azer*. "It was known to Eusebius and Jerome, and its position is laid down with minuteness in the *Onanasticon* as ten Roman miles west of Philadelphi and fifteen from Heshbon." (*Biblical Dictionary.*) Modern travellers are divided as to its exact site.

Ver. 6. "**Gilead.**" The mountainous district on both sides of the Jabbok. "**Tahtim-Hodshi.**" This word is very obscure, and neither ancient nor modern translators can discern any meaning in it, either as a proper name or as a descriptive phrase. It is generally agreed that the text is incorrect. "**Dan-jaan.**" "There seems no reason to doubt that the well-known Dan is intended. We have no record of any other Dan in the north, and even if this were not the case, Dan, as the accepted northern limit of the nation, was too important a place to escape mention in such a list as that in the text." (*Biblical Dictionary.*) The Vulgate reads Dan-jaar, which Gesenius translates *Dan in the wood*. This description agrees with the character of the country.

Ver. 7. "**Tyre,**" etc. That is, in the region afterwards called Galilee, in which it appears the heathen nations were not exterminated but tributary. (So Keil and others.) "The division into *Hivites* and Canaanites is remarkable; perhaps these were the most prominent of the surviving native races." (*Translator of Lange's Commentary*).

Ver, 8. **Gone through,** etc. "According to 1 Chron. xxi. 6, the census was not extended into Benjamin and Levi, "because the king's word was an abomination to Joab," and according to 1 Chron. xxvii 24, Joab did not finish his task because the plague broke out before he had finished.

Ver. 9. **Eight hundred thousand. . . . . Five hundred thousand.** These numbers do not agree with those given in Chronicles where a higher number is given for Israel and a lower for Judah (1,100,000 and 470,000). Some think there were two countings, one according to the private lists in the cities and villages, the other from the public registers, or that Chronicles includes the non-Israelites among the people. "The numbers are given in thousands, and therefore are only approximate statements in round numbers; and the difference in two texts arose chiefly from the fact, that the statements were merely founded upon oral tradition, since, according to 1 Chron. xxvii. 24, the result of the census was not inserted in the annals of the kingdom. There is no ground, however, for regarding the numbers as exaggerated, if we only bear in mind that the entire population of a land amounts to about four times the number of those who are fit for military service, and, therefore, 1,300,000, or even a million and a half, would only represent a total population of five or six millions—a number which could undoubtedly have been sustained in Palestine, according to thoroughly reliable testimony as to its unusual fertility." (*Keil*). "In this muster of Israel it is probable the standing army of David (1 Chron. xxvii.), which had before been numbered, is not reckoned, but it is inserted in the Chronicles. This standing army consisted of $12 \times 24{,}000 = 288{,}000$ men, who, with their chiliarchs and twelve generals, will make 300,000; and if these are added to the 800,000 mentioned here, the numbers in both places would coincide." (*Wordsworth*). With regard to the difference in the number allotted to the tribes of Judah, Wordsworth suggests that "perhaps David had 30,000 stationed with him at Jerusalem, and the other 470,000 were mustered by Joab."

Ver. 11. "**For,**" rather, *and*. It is not intended that God's visit produced the conviction in David's mind.

Ver. 13. "**Seven years.**" In Chronicles the number is *three*, which some expositors prefer as agreeing better with the connection, viz., *three* evils to choose from, and each lasting through *three* divisions of time. But, as Keil remarks: "This agreement favours the *seven* rather than the *three*, which is open to the suspicion of being intentionally made to conform to the rest." Some suggest that in the Chronicles three successive years *to come* were offered; and that the seven here include the three former years of famine, which, with the year then in course, would make seven.

Ver. 14. "**The hand of men.**" "It is not easy to see how this applies to famine; probably inasmuch as it tends more or less to create dependence upon those who are still in possession of the means of life." (*Keil.*) "War and famine would not have hurt David's own person. With noble disinterestedness he chose pestilence, in which he himself would be exposed to death no less than his subjects." (*Theoderet.*)

Ver. 15. "**The time appointed.**" A doubtful rendering, and some translate "to the time of the evening sacrifice," objecting that the pestilence did not last three days. But the phrase "time appointed" may even then be taken to refer to the appointed hour of evening sacrifice, or it may be as Erdmann suggests that "the narrator combining and, in the Hebrew fashion, anticipating what follows, means by this expression to say that God in His mercy permitted the

pestilence to go on only to a determined point of time *within* the three days." "**Seventy thousand.**" If the pestilence only lasted part of a day its violence was greater than any on record. It is recorded by Diodorus that in the siege of Syracuse 100,000 soldiers in the Carthaginian army died within a short time.

Ver. 16. "**The angel.**" Verse 17 affirms that David saw the angel. This then is no poetic figure, but a statement of a supernatural event, which removes the pestilence from the region of ordinary visitations of a similar nature. "**Jerusalem.**" "The pestilence seems to have broken out at opposite extremities of the country, and to have advanced with gigantic strides until it was ready to concentrate its violence upon Jerusalem." (*Jamieson.*) "**Lord repented.**" (See on 1 Sam. xv. 10.) "**Threshing-place.**" These places were in the open air, and usually outside the town or city, and on an eminence, if possible, in order to catch the wind, which was utilised to winnow the corn. "**Araunah the Jebusite.**" Called *Ornan* in the Chronicles, one of the old inhabitants of the land, who, having apparently become a worshipper of Jehovah, retained his possessions in the city.

Ver. 17. "**And David.**" According to Chronicles, the elders also clothed in sackcloth were with David at the time. "**I have sinned.**" "The punishment was sent for the people's own sin, though David's sin was the immediate occasion of its execution." (*Von Gerlach.*)

Ver. 23. "**As a king.**" The readings here differ somewhat. If we take it as translated in the English version, we must understand that Araunah belonged to the royal family of the Jebusites, an important fact which, as Thenius remarks, "would not have been stated in a single word." Another reading is: "*All this gives Araunah, the servant of my lord the king, to the king.*" Keil asserts that the noun is a vocative: *All this giveth Araunah, O king, to the king.*

Ver. 24. **Fifty shekels.** In Chronicles the sum is six hundred shekels of gold. No attempts that have been made to reconcile these statements are satisfactory, and it seems better to suppose a corruption of the text in one of the records. "Apparently the statement in Chronicles is the more correct of the two; for if we consider that Abraham paid four hundred shekels of silver for the site of a family burial-place, at a time when the land was very thinly populated, and therefore land must have been much cheaper than it was in David's time, the sum of fifty shekels of silver (about £6) appears too low a price." (*Keil*). "But it should be remembered that the field for which Abraham gave four hundred shekels was of considerable size, comprising the cave at one end, and also timber, perhaps several acres in all, whereas the threshing floor was probably not one hundred feet in diameter. The explanation given by Bochart (which is far the best) may possibly be true, that the fifty shekels here mentioned were gold shekels, each worth twelve silver shekels, so that the fifty gold shekels are equal to the six hundred silver; and that our text should be rendered, *David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen for money, viz., fifty shekels,* and that the passage in Chronicles should be rendered, *gold shekels of the value* (or weight) *of six hundred shekels.*

Ver. 25. "There." As we learn from 2 Chron. iii. 1, on Mount Moriah, afterwards the site of Solomon's temple. (See Critical Notes on chap. v. 7.)

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE CHAPTER.

The Numbering of the People.

I. The motive and spirit of a deed determine its moral character. From the human standpoint the act of David appears quite harmless, even if inexpedient or impolitic. It belongs to quite a different class from his adultery and murder, because those deeds at once shock the moral sense of everyone who has any spark of moral sensitiveness within him, while this arouses no such emotion. Yet God here convicts His servant of a great wrong, and David acknowledges the justice of the sentence. We must, therefore, look behind the outward action to the inward state of mind which prompted it, and find there the iniquity of which David confesses himself guilty. But this is in accordance with all the teachings of Holy Writ from the days of the fall to those of Christ. The deed which first brought death into the world and all our woe was one which in itself was trivial, and under other circumstances would have been innocent. But as an act of disobedience to a plain command it was a great transgression, heavily weighted with terrible, yet justly-merited, retribution.

Looking on the bright side of this doctrine, how small a thing it is to give a thirsty fellow creature a cup of cold water, and how often it may be done without having any moral significance. But Our Lord tells us there is a spirit and a motive which make this ordinary and simple act of great moral value and worthy of His notice and reward. So His anointing by Mary of Bethany. The deed itself was not so very remarkable, it was not to human eyes a very great act of devotion. But the acceptance which it met with from Him who read the heart of the doer seals it as one of no ordinary spiritual worth. In this, as in many other points, the religion of the Bible differs from and transcends all other systems. It enters into a man's soul and takes cognizance of what passes there, and condemns or justifies accordingly.

II. Very godly men are sometimes strangely inconsistent with themselves. Notwithstanding his deep spiritual experience and his ardent spiritual desires and emotions, David had very strong tendencies to obey the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. It seems almost impossible that the man who penned the 23rd Psalm could have ever been an adulterer and a murderer. It is, perhaps, more surprising at first sight that he who wrote the 51st Psalm could afterwards, in apostolic language, have fallen into such a "snare of the devil" as that in which we here find him. Yet every godly man who searches his own spirit knows how much there is still within him ready to respond to the suggestions of the evil one, and every Christian's life unites with that of David in testifying to the universality of the experience of Paul—*I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members* (Rom. vii. 22, 23).

III. A man's attitude after sin settles the question of character, and his position in relation to God. A child's character can be better estimated by the way in which he behaves under his father's just displeasure than by counting the actual number of his transgressions. So is it with God's children. The godly flee *to* God when they have sinned; the ungodly flee *from* Him (Psalm xxxiii. 1-8; 1 John 1-8). (On this thought see also on chap. xiv. 25-33, page 360. On the remonstrance of Joab see on chap xix. 1-15, page 384. On David's chastisement see on chap. xii. 14-25, page 346).

OUTLINES AND SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS.

Ver. 1. The Scripture is most careful that we should feel the reality of Divine intimations, that we should refer them to their true source, and yet that we should understand how possible it is for a man to pervert them and found wrong inferences upon them, if his own mind is not in a thoroughly pure and healthy condition. The thought that it was a blessing to be the head of a growing and thriving people—this was Divine. The thought that it was well for a ruler to be acquainted with the condition and resources of his people—this was Divine. . . . But the determination, just then, to send forth officers for the sake of ascertaining the armed forces of the land—this was the thought of a self-exalted man. . . . I do not know anything so instructive to us if we use them as we ought, as these passages in the Bible, which teach us that all good thoughts, counsels, just works, come from the Spirit of God, and at the same time that we are in most imminent peril every moment of turning the Divine suggestions into sin, by allowing our selfish and impure conceits and rash generalizations to mix with them. —*Maurice.*

Ver. 12. The chastisement was not sent while he was in a state of insensi-

bility to his sin, but after he awoke to a sense of it. It is not while the child is in a state of proud and hardened impenitence that the rod may be applied with most hope of success, but when conscience has begun to speak out, and soft relentings to appear. Dealing with conscience and appeals to the heart must ordinarily precede the infliction of punishment.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 14. Whatever correction is necessary to God's creatures, it is their request that He may be the immediate dispenser of it. 1. Because He is the fountain of mercy, and limits the punishment to the necessity. 2. He chastises to *reclaim* and not to *revenge.* 3. What comes from the hand of the Lord melts the heart and humbles the soul, as the rod in the hand of man can never do.

We do well believe thee, O David, that thou wert in a wonderful strait; this very liberty is no other than fetters; thou needest not have famine; thou needest not have the sword; thou needest not have pestilence; one of them thou must have; there is misery in all; there is misery in any; thou and thy people can die but once, and once they must die, either by famine, war, or pestilence. O God, how vainly do we hope to pass over our sins with impunity, when all the favour that David and Israel can receive is to choose their bane! —*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 10. "See then, David, thou hast gained thy purpose. What a power is this that is placed at thy disposal! A population of six millions, the inhabitants of the little tribes of Levi and Benjamin not being reckoned. What great things mayest thou now undertake! Who may dare raise his head so loftily as thou mayest, and who is there that may sit on his throne so free from care and so securely as thou dost?" So many in spirit might perhaps say to him. But what happens? Instead of glorying, the king bends his head, descends in silence from his seat, and withdraws into one of his more remote chambers; and now listen!—"I have sinned greatly in that I have done," he cries out with deep emotion of heart: "and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly!" Wonderful! That very thing from which David promised to himself kingly joy, now brings him only bitter sorrow, and that which ought to have added to his dignity, suddenly humbles him in deepest debasement. But this does not surprise us. As the sun always breaks through the clouds which encompass it, so the conscience, when once it is awakened and enlightened by the Spirit of God, always comes forth again victoriously out of every eclipse, and frees itself from every entanglement, and asserts anew its authority as a judge. Yea, in believers it constantly increases in tenderness, and becomes more and more like the apple of the eye, to which the smallest mote gives annoyance; nor can there be any rest obtained till it is removed. The world cannot comprehend how so many things which it thinks unimportant and small fill the children of God with such deep shame and make them so sad. "What is there so serious," it is perhaps said to them, "in examining thy treasures, or in seeking the favour of this or that influential man, or taking a lottery-ticket? Where is there a Divine *command* which thou hast thereby transgressed?" And, indeed, those who thus speak are *not* conscious where such a Divine precept is. But they know it well who have transgressed it. Their heart has forsaken the Lord and distrusted his power and love.—*Krummacher.*

What then, was David's sin? He will needs have Israel and Judah numbered. Surely there is no malignity in numbers; neither is it unfit for a prince to know his own strength. This is not the first time that Israel had gone under a reckoning. The act offends not, but the misaffection; the same thing had been commendably done out of a princely providence, which now, through the curiosity,

pride, misconfidence of the doer, proves heinously vicious. Those actions, which are in themselves indifferent, receive either their life or their bane from the intentions of the agent. Moses numbereth the people with thanks, David with displeasure. Those sins which carry the smoothest foreheads and have the most honest appearances, may more provoke the wrath of God than those which bear the most abomination in their faces. How many thousand wickednesses passed through the hands of Israel, which we men would rather have branded out for judgment than this of David's! The righteous judge of the world censures sins, not by their ill looks, but by their foul hearts.—*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 24. The principle that comes out in these words is one that will sweep the whole circle of worship, and work, and gifts, and personal religious life. I. *Worship.* For in our *buildings,* in our *service* of praise and prayer, preaching and hearing, we are to give our best in effort, in intelligence, in all things, facing and resisting every temptation to the contrary, with the words, "Shall I offer," etc. II. *Work.* Not to *schemes* only that are pleasant, and in *times* that are convenient, and by proxies that are easily obtainable will the true worker of God devote himself. III. *Gifts.* Not with careless gifts, almost covertly given, or the smallest coin dealt out niggardly, can he give who says, "Shall I offer?" etc. IV. *Personal religion.* There is meanness and ingratitude in the spirit that relegates all religious care to the leisure of Sunday, or of the sick-room, or of the infirmities of old age. Why should we not offer to God that which costs us nothing? Three questions may throw light upon it. 1. How far what costs you nothing *is any benefit to yourself?* Such may be of some benefit. But only what "costs something" call out, (1) highest *motives* and employs (2) all *faculties.* 2. How far what costs you nothing has much *influence upon the world?* Sacrifice is the subtle and tremendous element needed in all great influence. In the home, in the Church, in the state, they only climb true thrones, and wear real crowns, who have the spirit of sacrifice. The Saviour Himself relied upon that —"I, if I be lifted up, will draw," etc." So does the Eternal Father of men, for He has made "Christ," who is incarnate sacrifice, "the power of God." 3. How far what costs you nothing is *acceptable to God?* Christ's praise of the poor widow's gift, God's acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ—sufficiently indicate the Divine estimate of self-denial. And since that service which costs us something has the pulses of reality, the glow of love, and the reflection of Christ—it surely is acceptable to God. —*U. R. Thomas.*

Vers. 24, 25. An altar must be built in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite; lo, in that very hill, where the angel held the sword of Abraham from killing his son, doth God now hold the sword of the angel from killing his people! Upon this very ground shall the temple after stand: here shall be the holy altar, which shall send up the acceptable oblations of God's people in succeeding generations.

O God, what was the threshing-floor of a Jebusite to thee above all other soils? what virtue, what merit was in this earth? As in places, so in persons it is not to be heeded what they are but what thou wilt; that is worthiest, which thou pleasest to accept.—*Bp. Hall.*

It is very remarkable that before the outward foundations of the temple were laid, God's forgiving mercy was by God factually declared to be its spiritual foundation.—*Hengstenberg.*

Vers. 1–25. *Whom does the Lord smite for his sins?* Him who—1. Lets his heart be smitten by God's earnestness and goodness, and takes to heart the greatness of his sin in contrast to God's *loving kindness.* 2. Recognises his sin, in the light of God's *word,* as a transgression of His Holy will, and—3. Maintains in his sinning and in spite

of it the *fundamental direction* of his heart towards the living God, and has been preserved from falling away into complete unbelief.—*Erdmann.*

True and hearty repentance is preserved in the life of God's children. 1. In the penitent confession of their sin and guilt before the *judgment seat* of God. 2. In fleeing for refuge to the forgiving *grace* of God. 3. In humbly bowing under the punitive *justice* of God. 4. In a confidence which even amid Divine judgments does not waver in the delivering *mercy* of God.—*Erdmann.*

The *gradual succession* in the inner life of a penitent sinner under the chastening of God's love. 1. *Reproving conscience.* 2. *Penitent conscience.* 3. *Hearty prayer for forgiveness.* 4. *Humble bowing beneath the punishment imposed.* 5. *Unreserved submission to the Divine mercy.*—*Erdmann.*

This history leads us to notice—I. *The severity of God in punishing sin.* The sin which David committed was exceeding great. It was manifest even to so wicked a man as Joab. His punishment was proportionately severe. What shall we therefore think of sin? Is it so light a matter as men generally imagine? II. *The goodness of God in pardoning sin.* David evinced true contrition by pleading that the punishment might fall on him the guilty one, and not on his innocent people. Instantly did God command the angel to stay his hand

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